

**Maulana Bhashani's Haq Kotha:  
Post-independence Bangladesh Through the Lens of Radical Media**

by

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## **Abstract**

Bangladesh got its independence from Pakistan after nine months of the war in December 1971. After the war, a new government was established and started the formation of the new sovereign state. Shortly after independence, the nonagenarian leftist leader Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani started a weekly newspaper called Haq Kotha in February 1972. Haq Kotha focused on the condition of the subaltern groups. The newspaper also played the role of a watchdog for the new government and became a strong critic. The government arrested the editor of the newspaper and banned the newspaper after its thirtieth issue. This thesis argues that Haq Kotha played the role of a radical media that represented the disempowered people like the working class and ethnic minorities. This thesis explores the published contents of Haq Kotha and letters sent to the newspaper to find out the experience of the subaltern groups in the newly independent Bangladesh that were largely led by Maulana Bhashani and/ or were represented by Haq Kotha. The research reveals a critical understanding of national and political issues like the liberation war, the new constitution, socialism, religion, the role of powerful countries, and post-war crises like famine and corruption. Letters and reports of Haq Kotha uncover persecution of disempowered people including the working class, political opponents of the government, and minority groups like the Hindus and the Biharis and indigenous communities. The research also shows the influence of Maulana Bhashani in Haq Kotha which ideologically emphasized socialism and communal harmony.

Keywords: Bangladesh, Liberation War, Maulana Bhashani, Bengali Muslim, Radical Media, Socialism, Islam, Revolution, Spirituality.

## **Lay Abstract**

Shortly after the independence of Bangladesh, the leftist leader Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani started publishing a radical weekly newspaper called Haq Kotha in 1972. The newspaper focused on the experience and the condition of the disempowered people. This thesis explores the published contents of Haq Kotha and letters sent to the newspaper and reveals a critical understanding of different national and political issues. It also shows the persecution of different disempowered groups including the working class, ethnic minorities and political opponents. The newspaper had a strong influence by Maulana Bhashani's ideology which advocated communal harmony and socialism.

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## **Abbreviations**

AL:	Awami League
NAP:	National Awami Party
NAP (B):	National Awami Party (Bhashani faction)
NAP (M):	National Awami Party (Mujaffar faction)
CHT:	Chittagong Hill Tracts
CPM:	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
JASAD:	Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (National Socialist Party of Bangladesh)

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## Introduction

Three months after the liberation war of Bangladesh ended, a weekly newspaper published its first issue in the newly sovereign land with the headline, “There is no Example of Achieving Socialism without a Revolution done by the People, but...”<sup>1</sup> The news consisted of twelve points which were deemed necessary for the people of this war-torn country to survive and flourish as a sovereign country. These points focused on how to recover a country that had been ravaged by a bloody war. However, in the nuance of the report, one could also find hints of warnings. In a tone of reassurance, it tried to remind the government that it has the promise of establishing “true democracy and socialism.” In the twelfth point the report declared: “History has proven that socialism cannot be achieved without a revolution by the people. If Sheikh Mujib (President of Bangladesh) and Indira Gandhi of India can achieve that straight from the parliament, it will be a milestone for humankind. So, we must wait and observe what they do.”<sup>2</sup> The weekly soon attracted wide attention, partly because the publisher of the weekly was the veteran leader Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani.

When the weekly started publishing in 1972, the 92-year-old Maulana Bhashani was already well known as the most influential leftist national leader of Bangladesh. He had been one of the key political figures who was calling for independence over several decades. When the war

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<sup>1</sup> Haq Kotha, “There is no example of achieving socialism without a revolution done by the people, but,” *Haq Kotha*, February 25, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

broke out, he went to India to coordinate his followers to fight and help the provisional government of Bangladesh, which was leading the war against Pakistan. For the past couple of years, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who was then the President of Bangladesh, and his party the Awami League, had put aside their differences and worked together several times against the military junta of Pakistan. Maulana was already recognized for his support and role to mobilize people for an independent Bangladesh. Yet, when people could not even decide whether to mourn the dead or celebrate the victory, Maulana Bhashani started using his same skeptical tone against the state, a trait for which he would become well known. For the next few months, before it was banned, the weekly Haq Kotha would publish 30 issues which would turn out to be highly inflammatory toward the state. Haq Kotha had some unique characteristics among periodicals in Bangladesh during the 1970's. Haq Kotha simultaneously endorsed socialism and spirituality, a combination that was not common in Bangladesh. It was published from Santosh of Tangail, which was a rural town far from the capital city, Dhaka, where most national newspapers were published. Issues of Haq Kotha were available in the newsstands of all Bangladesh's major cities along with rural places and cost only 15 paisa, equivalent to 0.02 USD at that time.<sup>3</sup> This resulted in a strong reader-base, many of them from the working classes of rural Bangladesh. People from this reader base also played the role of Haq Kotha's journalist or news source. As a result, the contents of Haq Kotha represented a wide range of people. Maulana Bhashani was one of the main reasons why this wide range of people were attracted to Haq Kotha. He was a very popular leader among the people of Bangladesh, particularly among the working class as he was known as the 'leader of the oppressed' who fights for the rights of the toiling masses.

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<sup>3</sup> 1 USD = 7.5 BDT, 1 BDT = 100 paisa. *Bangladesh : A Country Study* (Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1989), <https://www.loc.gov/item/89600298/>.

This thesis investigates the weekly Haq Kotha as part of Maulana Bhashani's political project and argues that it became a form of radical media for subaltern groups in post-independent Bangladesh. The weekly provided a forum through which subaltern groups like the peasants, workers, minority groups were informed, questioned different issues, and challenged the state. This made Haq Kotha a very rich documentary source through which to understand some of the popular sentiments following the post-war condition of Bangladesh and what the peoples' primary concerns were. Besides the news, examining Haq Kotha also casts an important lens on how various political events were interpreted at the time. By analyzing Haq Kotha, this thesis seeks to answer: *"What was the experience of the subaltern groups in the newly independent Bangladesh that were largely led by Maulana Bhashani and/ or were represented by Haq Kotha?"*

Newly liberated but war torn Bangladesh was facing a lot of crisis at the same time like the broken infrastructure to run administrative works, thousands of people who lost everything or faced the brutality of the war, lack of economic support etc. The peoples' experience of having an independent country was not uniform. The people of Bengal had already gone through a nation building project during the partition, a process which took quite a toll. After the partition of India and Pakistan, East Bengal of Bengal became part of the nation of Pakistan in 1947<sup>4</sup> and became East Pakistan. East Bengal tried to coincide and become an integral part of the nation Pakistan. However, after more than twenty years of effort and struggle the Pakistan project turned out to be a failure for East Pakistanis and saw the rise of Bengali nationalism during this period. In 1971 it became a separate nation, Bangladesh.<sup>5</sup> So, the independence of Bangladesh is the second nation-building project Bengalis were facing in a short span of time. In this thesis, I have tried to look

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<sup>4</sup> Willem van Schendel, "Partition," in *A History of Bangladesh*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 112, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108684644>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

into the experience of the subaltern groups, like the farmers, fishermen, the minority ethnic and religious groups, during this new project of nation-building. To answer the broad question, the thesis is divided into four sub-questions: 1) how did Haq Kotha interpret the war of independence for and with this audience, 2) what were the central issues Haq Kotha was concerned with regarding the state and governance, 3) how did the weekly and its readers interpret political ideologies and concepts such as socialism and communal harmony 4) how did Haq Kotha try to increase the agency of the subaltern.

## **Background**

At the beginning of a very short autobiography, Maulana Bhashani wrote, “I have seen people. I have seen those who are toiling at the last layer of society are the first one to take the bullet. This is why my life could be insightful, as a witness to what happened to these people.”<sup>6</sup> Haq Kotha might make little sense without realizing who Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani was as a leader and mobilizer of people. As Haq Kotha was a political project initiated by Maulana Bhashani and centered around his political view, it is vital to understand Maulana Bhashani’s role. Understanding Bhashani as a politician, as a religious figure, and as a social reformer will give us a clearer sense of how Haq Kotha functioned as a political tool and how it countered the hegemony established by the new state. The relationship between Bhashani and his vast number of followers is also necessary to investigate critically. How Maulana and his followers politically mobilized helps to explain how Haq Kotha became a voice of the subaltern. Haq Kotha as a newspaper had

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<sup>6</sup> Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani, “Amar Jindegi,” n.d., Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

some unique features. It had a large reader base all over the country and very soon became one of the most popular and most widely circulated newspapers in Bangladesh.<sup>7</sup>

To understand Haq Kotha as radical media it is necessary to understand the condition of other newspapers of the period. When the war started in 1971, the Pakistani military attacked and shut down many news offices. They bombed and destroyed the office of the English newspaper *The People* on the night the war began, 25 March, 1971, and six journalists were killed by the Pakistani military.<sup>8</sup> They also burned down the offices of newspapers that were critical of the military junta, including *The Daily Ittefaq* and *Sangbad*. Later, the Pakistani junta allowed some newspapers to publish. These were either pro-junta like the right wing Islamist party *Jamat-e-Islam's* *The Daily Sangram* or newspapers that were under strict control of the junta.<sup>9</sup> These newspapers did not publish anything about the ongoing massacres conducted by the military. They were used by the Pakistani junta to show that everything in East Pakistan was fine and under control. However, during the war, different newspapers started to emerge in places liberated by the freedom fighters. There were around 36 newspapers and most of them were weeklies.<sup>10</sup> These newspapers played a vital role in building communication between the guerrilla freedom fighters and the public.

When Bangladesh got its independence, the whole infrastructure of the news publishing system was devastated. Many renowned journalists were killed and newspapers were burned to the ground. On 2 January, 1972, the new government took steps to restore some of the

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<sup>7</sup> Abu Salek, "Introduction," in *Mawlana Bhashanir Hak Kotha Samagra*, 5th ed. (Ghash Phul Nadi, 2014), i.

<sup>8</sup> Zulfikar Haider, "Ekattorer Patra-Patrika," in *Bangladesh Er Sangbadpatra O Sangbadikata* (Dhaka: Nabajug Prakashani, 2007), 182–92.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

newspapers.<sup>11</sup> The government initially opened newspapers such as the Daily Bangla, the Observer, Purbadesh, and Morning News. In 1972, around 300 newspapers started publishing where 151 were weeklies.<sup>12</sup> There were various newspapers with different perspectives and agendas. Many political parties and cultural organizations also started their own newspapers. It is difficult to tell if all of these newspapers were pro-government or how critically they observed the government's actions. Many newspapers were owned by the members of the ruling party. However, there are examples of newspapers that were banned or whose editors were arrested for criticizing the government. Besides Haq Kotha, newspapers such as Ganakantha, Desh Bangla, Suchona, Bangabarta, Lal Pataka, Mukha Patra, Spokesman, Naya Yug, and Ittihad, were banned during this government's rule.<sup>13</sup> All of these newspapers were accused of being anti-government or publishing false news against the government. Among these banned newspapers Haq Kotha achieved popularity and had the most circulation.<sup>14</sup> One of the main reasons behind Haq Kotha's success is that Maulana Bhashani was its patron.

Abdul Hamid Khan who later would be also known as Maulana Bhashani was a charismatic political figure of Bengal who contributed significantly to the making of Bangladesh. Born in 1885, he had a rich and unique political life that stretched from the British colonial period to post-independent Bangladesh.<sup>15</sup> Born in a poor family of Sirajganj, a rural district of East Bengal was initially known as a peasant leader credited for leading some of the most successful peasant

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<sup>11</sup> Zulfikar Haider, "Mujib Amoler Sangbadpatra," in *Bangladesh Er Sangbadpatra O Sangbadikata* (Dhaka: Nabajug Prakashani, 2007), 193–229.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 199-210.

<sup>14</sup> Abu Salek, ed., *Maulana Bhashanir Haq Kotha Samagra* (Ghash Phul Nadi, 2002)., ii.

<sup>15</sup> Syed Abul Maksud, *Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani*, 2nd ed. (Agamee Prakashani, 2014).

uprisings during the British period.<sup>16</sup> The Zamindars (feudal landowners) of British India first faced Maulana Bhashani as a troublesome peasant and mobilizer of farmers. “Bhashani” was a title given by the peasants and farmers from a farmers’ conference in a riverbed called Bhashan.<sup>17</sup> Having received religious education from Islamic scholars and having spent a brief time in Deoband, he was given the title for theologian, Maulana. In Deoband, he received his spiritual and political training from Sufis like Nasiruddin Bogdadi, Maulana Azad Sobhani.<sup>18</sup> Later he was trained in politics by becoming involved in various anti-colonial movements like the Khilafat movement, Satyagrahi movement, and peasant uprisings against landlords. This is where he built networks and relations with politicians who were vital to the anti-colonial movement. In the 1920s, he got in touch with and was inspired by the renowned anti-colonial leaders Chittaranjan Das and Subhash Chandra Bose and joined the Indian National Congress (INC).<sup>19</sup> INC is a very important political party in the history of India’s anti-colonial national movement, which functioned as a unifying force despite the abundance of conflicting circumstances.<sup>20</sup> Bhashani was particularly inspired by Chittaranjan Das. Both Das and Bose were very significant national leaders who advocated Hindu-Muslim unity against the British. Moreover, they had a connection with the revolutionaries who were marked as extremists by the British. While Congress leaders like Gandhi

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 30

<sup>17</sup> Peter Custers, “Maulana Bhashani and the Transition to Secular Politics in East Bengal,” *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 47, no. 2 (April 1, 2010): 232, <https://doi.org/10.1177/001946461004700204>.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 34-36

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 41-45

<sup>20</sup> Amales Tripathi and Amitava Tripathi, *Indian National Congress and the Struggle for Freedom: 1885-1947* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198090557.001.0001>.



rejected revolutionaries and their ideology, Chittaranjan tacitly supported them while Subhas Chandra greatly relied on their support.<sup>21</sup>

By the time the partition made East Bengal a part of Pakistan, Maulana Bhashani was already known as the leader responsible for peasant movements in East Bengal and Assam. He particularly became known as a peasant leader. He mobilized Bengali peasants in Assam against anti-Bengali policies now known as the Bangal Kheda Movement, and the anti-Line system movements.<sup>22</sup> During his time in both the Congress Party and the Muslim League, the political party that aimed to revive Muslims of India, he openly displayed skepticism towards the government. After the partition, Bhashani organized and formed the biggest political opposition to the Muslim League government, the Awami Muslim League, which later became the Awami League (AL). The Awami League soon became popular in East Pakistan which formed a coalition of East Bengal parties called the United Front. Their popularity was apparent when the United Front won the first provincial election of 1954 by a landslide. However, in 1957 Bhashani resigned from Awami League, over internal conflicts about foreign policy and self-governance, and founded the National Awami Party (NAP).<sup>23</sup> The majority of the leftist faction of the AL joined the NAP. Communists also joined and worked under the banner of NAP, since the Communist Party of Pakistan was banned by the government.<sup>24</sup> The NAP further split in 1967 and the Maoist faction joined forces with Bhashani's faction, NAP[B] to oppose the NAP[M] which is also known

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<sup>21</sup> Amales Tripathi and Amitava Tripathi, "The Second Phase (1907–1930)," in *Indian National Congress and the Struggle for Freedom: 1885-1947* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), 10, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198090557.001.0001>.

<sup>22</sup> Syed Abul Maksud, *Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani*, 2nd ed. (Agamee Prakashani, 2014), 48-52, 57-62.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 227.

<sup>24</sup> "Pakistan Outlaws Communist Party," *The Globe and Mail* (1936-), July 24, 1954.

as NAP [Mujaffar] and NAP [Moscow] represented the pro-Soviet faction.<sup>25</sup> Maulana Bhashani and NAP[B] would play a major role in the uprising of 1969 which toppled Pakistani military dictator Mohammed Ayub Khan.

If we look at Maulana Bhashani's political contribution, especially during the Pakistan period, he can easily be described as one of the key figures who shaped the politics of the subcontinent in general and Bangladesh in particular. As a socialist leader, he was a popular leader with some unique characteristics. For example, he was a 'Maulana,' an Islamic preacher. To many people in Bengal and Assam, he is a Sufi saint or a 'Pir,' yet he was also the left-leaning leader under whose command leftist politics in East Pakistan flourished. He is also credited for the transition from communal to secular politics in East Bengal. These qualities gave him titles like the Red Maulana or the Majlum Jananeta (Leader of the Oppressed). The philosophy which drove Maulana Bhashani is the revolutionary Sufi philosophy Rabubiyat which he subscribed to when he was a student of Islamic theology.<sup>26</sup> He was known to use Islamic language while advocating tolerance, class struggle, and particularly socialism. His use of popular folk culture was another key feature that was instrumental in his political campaign. Maulana Bhashani's use of Islamic narrative and folk culture was instrumental in his success of mass mobilization which ultimately led to a move on the left from communal and reactionary politics to a more tolerant and progressive politics.<sup>27</sup> Although he endorsed many thinkers and leaders from Europe and the West, the idea of

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<sup>25</sup> Syed Abul Maksud, *Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani*, 2nd ed. (Agamee Prakashani, 2014), 302

<sup>26</sup> Abid S. Bahar, "The Religious and Philosophical Basis of Bhasani's Political Leadership" (phd, Concordia University, 2003), <https://spectrum.library.concordia.ca/2294/>.

<sup>27</sup> Peter Custers, "Maulana Bhashani and the Transition to Secular Politics in East Bengal," *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 47, no. 2 (April 1, 2010): 231–59, <https://doi.org/10.1177/001946461004700204>.

socialism he propagated was not understood as a western concept. His inspiration included religious figures like the Prophet Muhammad or Abu Dharr Ghifari, along with other political figures like Mahatma Gandhi, Karl Marx, Chittaranjan Bose, Mao Tse Tung. In his long political life, which started as a participant of the anti-colonial movement, he had a reputation of being a vocal critic of authority, even within his own party. Throughout his life, Bhashani formed several political parties and helped broker party coalitions that became the main opposition force against the state.

### **State of Scholarship**

Surprisingly, there are only a handful of scholarly works on Maulana Bhashani.<sup>28</sup> These works have contributed much to our understanding of Maulana Bhashani's life and work. The earliest work on Maulana Bhashani was published in 2003 by Abid Bahar.<sup>29</sup> Bahar argues against some of the South Asian academic claims of Maulana Bhashani being a communist extremist with "no direction in politics" as he had been accused by his opposition. According to Bahar, Bhashani used a model of Islamic "liberal" ideas. Bahar also saw Bhashani's religious perspective as a "kind of mystic" in his vision of a human community not rent by division and oppression. Bahar argues that what might appear to be a "communist approach" or "no direction of politics" is consistent with a mystical ideology, in this case Rabubiyat. The paper's discussion on the condition of

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<sup>28</sup> Syed Abul Maqsood's works on Maulana Bhashani were vital for this thesis. His biography of Maulana Bhashani is one of the richest works done on Bhashani. The author meticulously collected data and traced Maulana Bhashani's personal and political life. The book paints the whole life of Maulana Bhashani with all the data the author could collect. Since the book is biographical, its main objective was to chronologically describe the events which the book did incredibly. This realization made the author publish several books on Maulana Bhashani each focusing on a certain aspect of his life. He also published *Kagmari Conference*, *Bhashani Kahini* (Stories of Bhashani), *Maulana Bhashani in India*.

<sup>29</sup> Abid S. Bahar, "The Religious and Philosophical Basis of Bhashani's Political Leadership" (phd, Concordia University, 2003), <https://spectrum.library.concordia.ca/2294/>.

Bengali Muslim and Islamic revivalism sets the ground where Maulana Bhashani received his political formation. Bahar's is one of the primary perspectives that more contemporary scholarship has begun to contest. In this thesis, I will argue for instance, that Bhashani was revolutionary rather liberal, because his movement called for radical change of the whole structure of the society.

Layli Uddin provides a very good understanding of Maulana Bhashani as a leader and his role in political mobilization.<sup>30</sup> Her work concentrates on the political mobilization of the peasant and lower-class during the time frame 1930-1971. The work examines some of the movements and resistance by the subaltern groups during this transition period from colonial to post-colonial rule which shows brilliantly their relationship with Maulana Bhashani. Uddin counters the existing historiography that treated the split of Pakistan as a result of Bengali nationalism or as inevitable. The previous scholarship emphasized elite ideas, actors, and institutions as architects of this split. She counters this point by demonstrating how subaltern groups imagined Pakistan and how they experienced it. She shows the complexity and richness of subaltern politics, key ideas, practices, alliances, and solidarities that were forged through Maulana Bhashani and which ultimately led to the struggle for independence.

Another important recent work is that of Peter Custers.<sup>31</sup> Custers shows Maulana Bhashani's role in the secularization of Pakistan's politics. Custers mostly focuses on the post-partition era when communal politics was at its peak in the whole Indian subcontinent. This article

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<sup>30</sup> Layli Uddin, "In the Land of Eternal Eid : Maulana Bhashani and the Political Mobilisation of Peasants and Lower-Class Urban Workers in East Pakistan, c.1930s-1971" (Ph.D., Royal Holloway, University of London, 2015), <https://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?uin=uk.bl.ethos.700629>.

<sup>31</sup> Peter Custers, "Maulana Bhashani and the Transition to Secular Politics in East Bengal," *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 47, no. 2 (April 1, 2010): 231–59, <https://doi.org/10.1177/001946461004700204>.

discusses Bhashani's significance in politics against the background of his training as a theologian and against the background of his ideology of Rabubiyat. It argues that although Bhashani had an Islamic outlook, he advocated the need for a separation between state rule and religious faiths. Moreover, Custers argues that Bhashani did not only prefer secularism, but also that he actually led the transition to secular politics in the decades that preceded the formation of Bangladesh in 1971. Custers showed that Bhashani methodically broadened the scope of non-communal politics. He also demonstrated the contrast between Bhashani's prioritizing of policy with some of his contemporaries in Muslim League and later the Awami Muslim League.

Mubashar Hasan examines the question of secularism and its roots in Bangladesh.<sup>32</sup> Hasan argues that contemporary politics in Bangladesh contradict the claim of having a secular Bengali nationalism rooted in strict separation of church and state. He asserts that all the major political parties manipulated religious nationalism to a certain extent. Hasan insists that finding these multiple roots and interpretations is important to understanding modern Bangladesh. He explains the diverse meanings of secularism and the crisis of secularism in contemporary Bangladesh and discusses the educated middle-class and Marxist intellectuals and their influence in constructing the idea of Bengali secularism. He takes on Howard Schuman's claim that "ordinary people" of East Pakistan revolted against the Pakistani military as a natural reaction to the military assault but with little or no awareness of the conflict between Muslim and Bengali identities.

These works have been instrumental to understand Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani's life and works. For this thesis, these works paved the way to look more critically about

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<sup>32</sup> Mubashar Hasan, "The Diverse Roots of the 'Secular' in East Pakistan (1947–71) and the Crisis of 'Secularism' in Contemporary Bangladesh," *History and Sociology of South Asia* 11, no. 2 (July 1, 2017): 156–73, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2230807517703721>.

the function and nature of Haq Kotha. They helped me frame Bhashani as a politician, mobilizer, and theologian, each of which was absolutely necessary to understand what Haq Kotha was aiming for. Most of these works focused on the Bhashani's work during the pre-partition and Pakistan period. There is less work on Bhashani after the independence of Bangladesh. This thesis attempted to shed light on that period. It shows that in independent Bangladesh, Bhashani still was an influential leader in shaping the political sphere despite being more than ninety years old. This thesis shows how Haq Kotha tried to uplift the opinion of the disempowered and broaden their agency. It also argues that Haq Kotha is an important source that shows the experiences of the subaltern life right after the independence of Bangladesh. Haq Kotha can be very useful to understand other incidents that would happen later in Bangladesh, like the position of political parties like AL and NAP, Bangladesh's relation with India, Hindu-Muslim communalism and the situation of the Bihari community etc.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This thesis uses postcolonial theories as the primary base to build its theoretical ground. It draws influence from works of post-colonial studies, such as the subaltern studies. Post-colonial theories fit in this thesis because the events were part of the decolonization process. These theories properly explain how colonization affected the political and economic conditions which resulted in these situations. Grounded in Marxist and Gramscian concepts, this theoretical field helps to describe historical events, especially conflicts from an economical class perspective, which was central in Haq Kotha. This is why Subaltern studies is instrumental here because it crosses the boundaries of what it means to be disempowered, in regards with class, race, gender and religion etc. Cox and Nilsen's 'movement from above and below' also derived from the Marxist theory which describes how social classes work towards increasing their agency. In short, with the help

of post-colonial, Gramscian and Marxist theories this thesis provides an image of Bangladesh right after its independence from a class perspective while incorporating postcolonial understanding. Here, instead of focusing on how power from the top was controlled, it shows how power from the bottom looks like and how disempowered people utilized Haq Kotha in hope of empowerment. This thesis follows thirty years of scholarship on Bangladesh, colonialism and Maulana Bhashani. It is aligned with other academic works on Maulana Bhashani such as works of Layli Uddin that acknowledged the fragmented and contingent nature in which ideas are formed and then acquired by the historian.<sup>33</sup>

There are some concepts that have been instrumental in this thesis and need to be defined clearly. This thesis adopted the Gramscian concept of subaltern. Subalternity does not only refer to the working class or it is not limited to only class relations. It refers to the marginalized social groups who are subordinated to the power, will, influence, leadership and direction of a dominant group.<sup>34</sup> It means Subalternity here is constituted through exclusion, domination and marginality in various forms. These could be groups who are marginalized by class, race, gender, religion. So, in context of this thesis, the subaltern groups include, the farmers, fishermen, jute mill workers as well as freedom fighters who were persecuted because of different political affiliation, the indigenous people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts and the Biharis who were branded as enemies of the nation etc.

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<sup>33</sup> Layli Uddin, “In the Land of Eternal Eid : Maulana Bhashani and the Political Mobilisation of Peasants and Lower-Class Urban Workers in East Pakistan, c.1930s-1971” (Ph.D., Royal Holloway, University of London, 2015), <https://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?uin=uk.bl.ethos.700629>.

<sup>34</sup> Marcus E Green, “Rethinking the Subaltern and the Question of Censorship in Gramsci’s Prison Notebooks,” *Postcolonial Studies* 14, no. 4 (December 1, 2011): 399–400, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2011.641913>.

This thesis argues for Haq Kotha as a radical media. To define radical media I borrowed from the works of Michael Goddard. He put it as “while the vast majority of media practices and ecologies could be considered minor, since this term is potentially applicable to all non-hegemonic media practices in general, radical media must partake of a transformation of existing, dominant media practices, whether this is understood in aesthetic, perceptual, or political terms.”<sup>35</sup>

Spirituality is another concept that came up frequently in this thesis. It is necessary to understand what spirituality or ‘Addhyamikata’ means in this context. Here, it is mostly connected with the mystical interpretations of different religion and philosophy, particularly Islam. Even though most of the time it is connected with the Sufi tradition, it also addressed ‘addhyamikata’ as an entity that is available in all religions. Spirituality in this case is also regarded as a political content. Moreover, I aligned with the works of Prathama Banerjee and used the term spirituality instead of religion because it is a rather narrow category, with its inescapable identitarian and civilizational connotations<sup>36</sup>. Similar to Banerjee I am using the term spirituality as a placeholder, “denoting the whole complex of philosophy, theology, ethics, performance, and practice that constitutes what we today understand as the domain of the non-secular”.<sup>37</sup> Banerjee’s work is also relevant and important in this context as she showed how equality comes to be staged on a spiritual register in modern times through the writings of late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century.

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<sup>35</sup> Michael Goddard, *Guerrilla Networks: An Anarchaeology of 1970s Radical Media Ecologies* (Amsterdam University Press, 2018), 12, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9789048527533>.

<sup>36</sup> Prathama Banerjee, “Equality and Spirituality,” in *Elementary Aspects of the Political: Histories from the Global South*, 2020, 124, <https://doi.org/10.1215/9781478012443>.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.



Communalism is also a frequent topic in this thesis and it is necessary to understand it in the context of South Asian history. Here communalism specifically means the communal tension between the Hindu and the Muslim community of the subcontinent. This Hindu-Muslim communal tension was a major concern during the partition of India and it still was when Bangladesh was independent. So, while discussing topics such as communalism, anti-communalism or communal harmony, it primarily indicates the Hindu-Muslim communal conflicts. However, other forms of communalism are also discussed in this thesis like the conflicts between Bengalis and the indigenous people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts or between Bengalis and the Urdu speaking Bihari community where communalism was based on ethnicity instead of religious identity.

When it comes to describing social conflict, class models are very helpful to use and describe these conflicts. Starting from Marx's work, there has been much work done that tried to explain class conflicts. The concept of movement from above and below is used in this paper and was developed by Cox and Nilsen. They did excellent work on both Marxism and social movements concepts which explored how 'human beings make their own history', from above as well as from below, intentionally and unintentionally.<sup>38</sup> Interestingly, rather than a field-specific theory of social movement as a self-contained space, they situate social movements from above and below at the center of an explanation of social change, treating it as interrelated aspects of popular agency. This means it is comparable to and in conflict with the collective action of the elites. They defined *movement from above* as "the social movements from above that seek to create and consolidate economic and power structures which in turn give direction and meaning to the routines and lived experience of everyday life, social movements from below tend to reverse this

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<sup>38</sup> Laurence Cox and Alf Gunvald Nilsen, *We Make Our Own History: Marxism and Social Movements in the Twilight of Neoliberalism*, Book, Whole (London: PlutoPress, 2014), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt183p7wb>.

order”.<sup>39</sup> Now, can the newly formed state be regarded as a movement from the above is an argument this thesis will not go into because it would require much more insight. It can be debated from many perspectives since it was still in the process of having a solid structure. On the other hand, social *movements from below* are the collective agency of subordinate groups. It is defined as “the organization of multiple forms of locally generated skilled activity around a rationality expressed and organized by subaltern social groups, which aims either to challenge the constraints that a dominant structure of needs and capacities impose upon the development of new needs and capacities or to defend aspects of an existing dominant structure which accommodate some of their specific needs and capacities.”<sup>40</sup> This thesis argues that Haq Kotha was a part of the movement from below through which the subaltern class was trying to either create influence on the formation of the state or counter the state, regarding it as a movement from above.

If social movements from below have shaped our society then so do the movements from above. This happened as a result of the conflict with the powerful movements from above. Movements from above may include successive forms of capitalist accumulation, new types of state and hegemony, racist mobilisations and patriarchal movements, new forms of ‘common sense’ and brute force which have all attempted, often effectively, to reinforce existing structures of power, exploitation and sociocultural hierarchies. The new ruling party, the Awami League after independence, were in the process of forming a new state with popular support. However, this thesis argues Haq Kotha saw the formation of the new state by the government as a movement from above as it was also forming and protecting a new ruling class.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 72

<sup>40</sup> Ibid

On the other hand, movements from below are not static entities. These can change and develop which actually creates the possibility of moving beyond forms of collective action that are limited to specific and locally circumscribed grievances, demands and objectives. The starting point of the ‘movement process’ can be people’s situated experience of a lifeworld or the context of their daily lives. This theoretical framework also draws Gramsci’s conception of common sense<sup>41</sup>. This is actually a combination of two components. These two components are ‘the established ways of doing things and their rationale, which constitute the molecular workings of the hegemonic projects of movements from above, and the practical and often tacit experience of those workings as somehow problematic and the various forms of practice developed as a response to and geared towards countering frustrations with the everyday status quo.’ The latter part can be described as the Gramscian concept of the ‘good sense’ by which it means to those more or less submerged aspects of subaltern consciousness that indicate that ‘the social group in question may indeed have its own conception of the world’<sup>42</sup>. In this case it is the subaltern class which followed Bhashani as their religious or political leader.

Another Gramscian term which this thesis has incorporated is the concept of organic intellectualism. According to Gramsci this means, “an intellectual or someone of professional standing who rises to that level from within a social class and remains connected to that class and traditional intellectual”<sup>43</sup>. On the other hand, traditional intellectuals represent the function of the general reproduction of the system, which is an autonomous, independent group that “perceives

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 74

<sup>42</sup> Andrew Robinson, “Towards an Intellectual Reformation: The Critique of Common Sense and the Forgotten Revolutionary Project of Gramscian Theory,” *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 8, no. 4 (December 1, 2005): 469–81, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13698230500205045>.

<sup>43</sup> Ian Buchanan, “Organic Intellectual,” in *A Dictionary of Critical Theory* (Oxford University Press, 2010).

its own uninterrupted historical continuity that mirrors the continuity of the existing social order<sup>44</sup>. In this thesis Maulana Bhashani has been considered as an organic intellectual as opposed to traditional intellectuals. According to Gramsci, it is the organic intellectuals' duty to speak to the obscured precepts of folk wisdom, or common sense of their respective political spheres. These intellectuals would represent excluded social groups of a society, what Gramsci referred to as the subaltern. However, not all organic intellectuals represent the excluded group and only represent the particular group the person emerged from. This thesis argues that one of the features that makes Maulana Bhashani unique and enabled him to have such a unique relationship with his followers is that he is an organic intellectual who emerged from a subaltern group.

## **Methodology**

Collecting resources particularly collecting issues of Haq Kotha has been quite challenging for some reasons. The primary obstacle is access to the materials in the public archives. That time period is very sensitive and debated in terms of political history. Considering how the state has been dealing with historical debates, it is not surprising if the newspaper is still considered controversial by the ruling party. Officially it is still unclear why but at present it is difficult if not impossible, to gain access to newspapers between 1972-1975, from any public archives of Bangladesh. However, it will not be far-fetched if one assumes there are political agendas at play to restrict this information from the public. Fortunately, access to the personal collection of the editor of Haq Kotha, Syed Irfanul Bari was granted for this thesis. This vast collection includes issues of Haq Kotha, pictures, documents, and letters written by the readers of Haq Kotha. This rich collection was instrumental for this thesis to access additional information that would not have

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<sup>44</sup> Michele Filippini, "Society," in *Using Gramsci: A New Approach* (Pluto Press, 2016), 69, [https://doi.org/10.26530/open\\_625289](https://doi.org/10.26530/open_625289).

been found in the public archive. This thesis also looked into digital archives for other contemporary newspapers of that time.

The research focused on two kinds of primary sources from the Syed Irfanul Bari collection. First, I looked into the published thirty issues of Haq Kotha. Among these thirty issues, I looked for contents that are related with the research questions this thesis is based on. This included hard news, articles, editorials, op-eds etc. Here the research tried to analyze what information the published content reveals. Besides the provided information, it also looked into what the newspaper was claiming or indicating about a specific matter. This is why it was necessary to take account of the nuances of these contents. The nuances such as the positive or negative connotations, symbolism or metaphorical arguments, satirical or skeptical tone within the contents often provides a deeper understanding of what the newspaper was claiming.

This research also looked into the letters and postcards from the Syed Irfanul Bari collection. These were sent by the readers of Haq Kotha and followers of Maulana Bhashani. The research focused on the contents as well as the writers of these letters since it also gave insights about who were engaging with Haq Kotha. These were instrumental to understand the relationship existed between Haq Kotha and its readers.

### **Outline of the thesis**

The war of independence is without any doubt significant in this context. Chapter one examines the thirty issues of Haq Kotha from 25 February 1972 to 22 September 1972. It seeks to understand how the weekly interpreted and viewed the war of independence retrospectively. There are different interpretations of the causes and effects of the war. This difference of understanding about the war resulted in different conclusions regarding many issues like the meaning of

independence, treating war criminals, treating allies, etc. As mentioned before, this is the second nation-building project these people were facing. The war certainly meant the end of the previous project. This thesis argues that Haq Kotha should be regarded as a key source to uncover how different subaltern groups such as the working class, ethnic and religious minorities, and political groups facing persecution understood the war. This chapter also shows how Haq Kotha tried to construct a narrative of the peoples' history of the unmaking of Pakistan and creating Bangladesh.

Chapter two investigates Haq Kotha's news reporting on and critique of the state. The state itself was doubtlessly an important actor in the formation of this new nation of Bangladesh. From the beginning, the newly independent government was one of the primary target audiences of Haq Kotha. Maulana Bhashani and his news correspondents, which included the working class, made the Haq Kotha a platform to highlight not only how they were being affected by the decisions of the government but also to reflect on questions of how Bangladesh should be governed. Even though Maulana Bhashani and president Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had differences ideologically, their relation was not hostile.<sup>45</sup> They used to work together when Bhashani was the president of Awami League. Even after leaving AL, Bhashani supported Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and collaborated on several occasions. An ideal example would be the Agartala Conspiracy case of 1968. Bhashani not only protested but mobilized people to set free Rahman and others who were arrested by the Pakistani military junta in accusation of conspiring with India.<sup>46</sup> Yet, Bhashani's harsh stance against the new president's authority was no different than his criticism of the

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<sup>45</sup> M R Akhter Mukul, *Bhashani Mujiber Rajniti*, 2nd ed. (Sagar Publishers, 2001).

<sup>46</sup> Syed Abul Maksud, *Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani*, 2nd ed. (Agamee Prakashani, 2014), 308-309.

previous government. This begs the question of why he felt the necessity to build something that would challenge Rahman's authority from such an early stage.

The third chapter looks at how Haq Kotha dealt with ideology. Socialism and communal harmony both were key points in the political life of Maulana Bhashani. The weekly Haq Kotha was no exception. The newly independent country was supposed to be built on a foundation of socialism and secularism entwined with democracy.<sup>47</sup> Although when Pakistan was born in 1947, the political sphere was a deeply contested space, but it also consisted communal and anti-socialist influence. Maulana Bhashani was one of the core leaders from the East Pakistan front who founded political parties, organizations, and institutions like the Awami League and the National Awami Party (NAP), which pushed for socialism and communal harmony.<sup>48</sup> However, ideas such as socialism or anti-communalism in this case have influences other than traditional leftist and secular organizations. For example, secularism in Bangladesh was also understood as a political ideology of impartiality. It was meant to promote inclusion and tolerance for other religions rather than implying no religion.<sup>49</sup> Maulana Bhashani who was also an Islamic spiritual 'Pir' or a teacher to many, used spirituality or 'Addhyamikata' as a political ideology to promote concepts like socialism, equality and communal harmony.<sup>50</sup> Maulana Bhashani's political ideology consistently advocated that spirituality is not in conflict with political concepts like socialism, equality, and

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<sup>47</sup> Willem van Schendel, "Imagining a New Nation," in *A History of Bangladesh*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 208, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108684644>.

<sup>48</sup> Peter Custers, "Maulana Bhashani and the Transition to Secular Politics in East Bengal," *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 47, no. 2 (April 1, 2010): 231–59, <https://doi.org/10.1177/001946461004700204>.

<sup>49</sup> Willem van Schendel, "Imagining a New Nation," in *A History of Bangladesh*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 208, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108684644>.

<sup>50</sup> Spirituality has been defined and further discussed in the theoretical framework section of this chapter.

anti-communalism. Instead, spirituality can be a source that complements these values. So, socialism and communal harmony were particularly important concepts that were not only related to how the state would be governed but also was very much present in the political discourses of Maulana Bhashani and his followers. This chapter examines which political and spiritual ideology it upheld through its publications and how concepts like socialism and communal harmony were described.

Finally, this thesis also considers Haq Kotha's attempt to represent the people of Bangladesh and to increase their agency. The fourth chapter focuses on how Haq Kotha gathered the information that set their agendas and how they produced news. More specifically, it looks into the peoples' role in the process of gathering and disseminating information through Haq Kotha. The thesis examines who were the people that were engaging with Haq Kotha and how much space the newspaper provided for them. This chapter covers the letters sent to the paper along with published content that focused on non-staff peoples' involvement. This chapter finds peoples' active participation who were providing information and sharing their personal experience. It discovers a variety of groups of people were reaching out to Haq Kotha because they were facing persecution. This included ethnic groups, working class people like farmers and workers, political activists, freedom fighters and enemy collaborators. This chapter ultimately connects these participants with the published contents of the newspaper which are discussed in the previous three chapters. It exclusively deals with the experience of post-independent Bangladesh by these various groups of people. It uncovers and deals with some of the less spoken parts of Bangladesh's history such as persecution of the freedom fighters and massacre of the Bihari community by the Bengalis.



## Chapter One

### Understanding the “Birth of Bangladesh” through Haq Kotha

The war of independence for Bangladesh in 1971 lasted nine months. It was surprisingly short considering the length of other contemporaneous anti-colonial and independence struggles, such as that of Vietnam. When the partition of India happened in 1947, the province of Bengal was divided.<sup>51</sup> East Bengal, which consisted of a Muslim majority became part of Pakistan and was named East Pakistan. At that time, East Pakistan and West Pakistan were approximately 1,800 kilometres apart with the newly independent Indian nation-state in between. For the next 23 years, these two wings would try to function as one country, under one united government. From the beginning, however, the two wings were imbalanced. Tensions rose particularly as East Pakistanis felt they were being exploited and deprived of their rights by legislation being drafted in and controlled by West Pakistan. Exploitative structures in the sphere of politics, economics, and culture created an intra-state form of imperialism.<sup>52</sup>

This imbalance and inequality between the two wings of the Pakistani state resulted in the rise of Bengali nationalism and the demands for the independence of East Pakistan, formerly East Bengal, from West Pakistan. The political coalition United Front, four political parties from East Pakistan largely led by the Awami Muslim League, won the first provincial election in 1954. The

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<sup>51</sup> Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932–1947*, Cambridge South Asian Studies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511563256>.

<sup>52</sup> K.P. Misra, “Intra-State Imperialism: The Case of Pakistan,” *Journal of Peace Research* 9, no. 1 (March 1, 1972): 27–39, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002234337200900102>.

military junta staged a coup-d'état and declared a state of emergency in 1958 and the entire political class was swept aside. From 1958 to 1970, the military ruled under the strict imposition of martial law.<sup>53</sup> For East Pakistan martial law meant that power was now even more decisively in the hands of West Pakistan. East Pakistan's politicians and the elite had wielded power mainly through political mobilisation, with limited access in the army or the bureaucracy. In fact, the headquarters of Pakistan's army, air force and navy were all in West Pakistan.<sup>54</sup> In 1969, mass protests arose which replaced dictator General Ayub Khan with General Yahya Khan who announced that political activities were to be allowed from early 1970.<sup>55</sup> In the first free election, in 1970, the Awami League won the national election, but the military junta again refused to hand over power. On the night of March, 25, 1971, the Pakistani military attacked East Pakistan, igniting the war of independence. Bengalis had created their own forms of resistance and fought their independence.<sup>56</sup> The war ended when the Pakistani army surrendered on December 16, 1971, with the direct help of India and also indirectly from the Soviet Union. During this tumultuous period, Bengalis saw fierce violence from the Pakistani armed forces. As a result of the war and violence, millions of people were internally displaced. An estimated 1,700,000 to 3,000,000 people died during this war and rape became a part of systematic genocide conducted by Pakistani forces. The infrastructure of the country was leveled, as roads, ports, and important landmarks were destroyed.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Willem van Schendel, "The Pakistan Experiment," in *A History of Bangladesh*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 141, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108684644>.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Willem van Schendel, "Pakistan Falls Apart," in *A History of Bangladesh*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 147, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108684644>.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 153.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 183-196

During this period, Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani's followers largely derived from the working classes, which included farmers, workers, fisherman, blacksmiths, craftsmen, and others who lived mostly in rural Bengal. Many of them looked up to Bhashani as a religious leader. His political party, the National Awami Party (NAP), was a Socialist party with Maoist leanings. NAP also had a constituency from the middle classes too, although it was oriented predominantly to the interests of the working classes. Previous works have shown that Bhashani possessed political spaces and constituencies that were not completely encapsulated or accommodated within the politics practiced by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman or the Awami League.<sup>58</sup> Together, these were all a part of the reader-base of Haq Kotha, organ of the political project of Maulana Bhashani. To understand how working-class people saw the war through their readership and contributions to Haq Kotha, it is necessary to keep in mind their position and role in this conflict. Moving forward, this chapter explores Maulana Bhashani and his follower's role in this struggle for independence before the war breaks out and how Haq Kotha linked those positions after the war. The parties who contributed to this struggle did not share one sole "narrative" of what independence meant. This is visible in how Haq Kotha dealt with some of the post-war issues, presented understandings of Bengali nationalism, and reported on the unmaking of Pakistan.

### **Freedom on demand: AL's Six points vs. NAP's fourteen points**

Haq Kotha's interpretation and understanding of the war can be traced back to the demands Maulana Bhashani and his party National Awami Party (NAP) made during the process of seeking autonomy for East Pakistan. From the beginning of East Pakistan's struggle for independence and

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<sup>58</sup> Layli Uddin, "In the Land of Eternal Eid : Maulana Bhashani and the Political Mobilisation of Peasants and Lower-Class Urban Workers in East Pakistan, c.1930s-1971" (Ph.D., Royal Holloway, University of London, 2015), <https://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?uin=uk.bl.ethos.700629>, 227.

the rise of Bengali nationalism, Maulana Bhashani's position was not always aligned with other pro-independence parties on every issue. These differences or divides stemmed from the group alliances and social-class membership of party constituencies. Maulana Bhashani opposed the Six Point demands made by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman of Awami League (AL) in 1966.<sup>59</sup> The Six Point Movement was popular and considered a significant turn in the political climate of East Pakistan.<sup>60</sup> The Six Point Movement and its leader were met by persecution and oppression by the government. During this time, Rahman was arrested and charged with a conspiracy theory against the state. Maulana Bhashani and NAP vocally opposed the persecution by the government but also opposed the movement's demands and gave its own fourteen points of demand instead.<sup>61</sup> For both cases, the focus of these demands was to gain autonomy and diminish the internal colonial rule between the two wings. Even though it was deemed a separationist move, none of the demands indicated separating or becoming a whole new country. So gradually, these demands for autonomy and national liberation later transformed into the struggle for independence.<sup>62</sup>

Maulana Bhashani did not directly oppose the six points, but criticized the demands as 'incomplete' and failing to assure a democratic and autonomic East Pakistan, instead of one that could easily be left under military junta rule. The central committee of NAP arranged a four-day long assembly from June 4th to 7th of 1966. In the assembly, the committee presented a report on the political situation of the country. The sub-committee appointed by Bhashani prepared this

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<sup>59</sup> Abdur Rahim Azad and Shah Ahmed Reza, *Ekush Dafa Thekey Panch Dafa* (Dhaka: Shamaj Biggan Gabeshana Kendra, 1987), 136-139.

<sup>60</sup> Willem van Schendel, "Pakistan Falls Apart," in *A History of Bangladesh*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 145, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108684644>.

<sup>61</sup> Syed Abul Maksud, *Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani*, 2nd ed. (Agamee Prakashani, 2014), 288.

<sup>62</sup> The Awami League's demands are available in Appendix 1 of this thesis.

report. At the end of the assembly, NAP hoisted fourteen demands based on the report.<sup>63</sup> The fourteen points for ‘national liberation,’ while technically not contradictory to the six points, did extend further nuanced demands..<sup>64</sup> It is noteworthy that the six points started with an appeal to follow the original Lahore Resolution, which argued for the establishment of a separate homeland for the Muslims of British India, whereas the fourteen points did not mention or put any weight on the Lahore Resolution. The Lahore Resolution, passed by the All-India Muslim League in 1940, is particularly significant because it was the resolution that called for a separate nation for Muslims in India. This is why it is also known as the declaration of independence of Pakistan. So, in the context of the birth of Pakistan and Pakistani nationalism, the Lahore Resolution holds significance.<sup>65</sup> This rejection of acknowledging or incorporating the Lahore Resolution can be a sign of NAP distancing itself from the making of the Pakistan project. However, NAP would later refer to the Lahore Resolution when they declared free East Pakistan.<sup>66</sup> NAP’s demands for national liberation were concerned with three issues generally. They were worried about creating a governance system with an infrastructure that would allow self-determination and autonomy for the people, nationalizing resources and restricting private capitalization that will benefit the workers and farmers, and becoming an anti-imperial nation outside the influence of big countries, particularly the U.S. Therefore, they demanded the elimination of SEATO and SEPTO military pacts with the U.S.. The assembly where the fourteen demands were declared also commented on NAP’s view regarding the centralized power. It added,

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<sup>63</sup> Syed Abul Maksud, *Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani*, 2nd ed. (Agamee Prakashani, 2014), 288.

<sup>64</sup> The fourteen points are available in Appendix 2.

<sup>65</sup> Willem van Schendel, “Towards Partition,” in *A History of Bangladesh*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 104, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108684644>.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, 375

“The present system of the government is not compatible for the people of Pakistan; it rather proved to be harmful. This presidential system is failing to meet the needs of this country. The presidential system that gives centralized power to the president cannot function properly when the two parts of the country are separated by a thousand miles with an entire country in the middle.<sup>67</sup>”

NAP’s demands were focused on centralized power, autonomy, and the voting system. They demanded autonomy for the East Pakistan wing and other regions of Pakistan that were facing similar discrimination like Baluchistan. What makes NAP’s demands different from Awami League’s is that it saw regulating labor, property laws, and anti-imperialism or foreign intervention as crucial as gaining autonomy to achieve “national liberation.” It also included releasing political prisoners and broadening scopes for labor organizations. Therefore, a fundamental difference between the two party’s demands is that while AL’s demands focused more on empowering the provincial government and increasing its authority, NAP included other demands that would increase the political and economic agency for the people of all classes, mostly the working class like the farmers and the workers. Later in Haq Kotha, some of the same points would reemerge as crucial issues for postwar Bangladesh.

### **The Independence Day**

It is not surprising that the war would weigh heavy in a country that was just climbing out of significant conflict, displacement, and violence. In the case of Haq Kotha, it was not an exception. In Haq Kotha there were more warnings of what was on the horizon instead of celebrating the victory. The newspaper's authors expressed wariness and urged its readers to be

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid

more cautious in their evaluation of what was happening. In the earlier issues, the topic of the war was often brought up in news stories and articles that dealt with defining political independence. The newspaper's reflections on choosing what day should be Bangladesh's Independence Day provides some important points regarding its understanding of the war.

The government announced Independence Day to be March 26th. At midnight of March 25, 1971, the Pakistani military cracked down on Dhaka with severe brutality, killing civilians, especially politicians, students, and Hindu minorities.<sup>68</sup> On March 26 of 1971, the war broke out, and East Pakistan was declared independent by the resistance forces through radio and called out all Bengalis to participate in the war for independence. In March 1972, Haq Kotha published two articles consecutively arguing about what day should be the day of Independence for Bangladesh.<sup>69</sup> The article questioned why the government decided to choose this day as Independence Day instead of taking people's opinions. The article argued that even though on March 26, the war broke out, that does not necessarily mean that it should be the day to mark the beginning of independence. Further, it argued, the government imposed the national holiday on March 26th just like the military had imposed the war upon Bengalis. The article later quoted Maulana Bhashani and suggested it should have been November 12, the day the catastrophic Bhola cyclone devastated the Bengal region in 1970.

So why is that Haq Kotha chose to associate independence with a cyclone event rather than the day when the war broke out? This reflects two aspects of how Haq Kotha was interpreting the

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<sup>68</sup> Srinath Raghavan, "Breakdown," in *1971: A Global History of the Creation of Bangladesh* (Harvard University Press, 2013), 34–53, <https://doi.org/10.4159/harvard.9780674731295.c3>.

<sup>69</sup> Haq Kotha, "Amader Swadhinata Kobe?," *Haq Kotha*, March 10, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection; Haq Kotha, "Amader Swadhinata Kobe?-2," *Haq Kotha*, March 17, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

war. First of all, they saw the Bhola cyclone as more significant in that it triggered or transformed the political landscape of East Pakistan and pushed them towards a separate country instead of autonomy like AL was demanding at that time. East Pakistan saw the peak of Bengali nationalism when Bengalis fought to have Sheikh Mujibur Rahman released from jail and overthrew the Ayub regime in 1969 through a vast mass uprising. Maulana Bhashani and NAP played a leading role in organizing this uprising.<sup>70</sup> However, East Pakistan was still demanding autonomy and an elected government. These changed after the devastating Bhola cyclone of 1970, where at least 500,000 people died in East Pakistan. Many, including NAP, criticized West Pakistan's negligence for not taking precautions and not taking proper steps to help the victims or sending reliefs.<sup>71</sup> Maulana Bhashani was enraged and considered this as the last straw. After visiting the affected area, the furious Maulana gave a historic speech in Paltan Maidan of Dhaka. The speech was about what he witnessed in Bhola; unspeakable misery of the 'Majlums,' a broad term used to refer to the oppressed people. Bhashani also spoke about the central government's ineffective and unsympathetic role. The speech was very influential in the public sphere of East Pakistan.<sup>72</sup> A hint of how moving it was is visible in the poem 'Safed Panjabi' by Shamsur Rehman, a famous Bengali poet who was also part of the crowd who attended the speech.<sup>73</sup> In the speech, Bhashani declared Sadhin Purba-Pakistan Zindabaad or "Long live independent East Pakistan."

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<sup>70</sup> Layli Uddin, "In the Land of Eternal Eid : Maulana Bhashani and the Political Mobilisation of Peasants and Lower-Class Urban Workers in East Pakistan, c.1930s-1971" (Ph.D., Royal Holloway, University of London, 2015),

<https://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?uin=uk.bl.ethos.700629>, 225-275.

<sup>71</sup> Willem van Schendel, "Pakistan Falls Apart," in *A History of Bangladesh*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 148, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108684644>.

<sup>72</sup> Syed Abul Maksud, *Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani*, 2nd ed. (Agamee Prakashani, 2014), 361-367.

<sup>73</sup> Shamsur Rehman, *Safed Punjabi*, 1970, 1970.



NAP declared that they would forfeit the upcoming national election, and from now on, their main objective would be to achieve the independence of East Pakistan. A clear declaration of separation. They also cut all ties with NAP of West Pakistan. On December 4th, Maulana Bhashani called for a boycott of the national election, and called upon Bengali to organize and prepare for the fight for independence.<sup>74</sup> They openly chanted “Sadhin Purba-Pakistan Zindabaad”, “Long live free East Pakistan” and “Bhoter bakshe lathi maro, Bangladesh Shadhin Koro,” “Kick the ballot box, free Bangladesh.” The logic behind preferring November 12 was that it marked a tragedy from which the people realized independence could be the only option. As such, it transformed the struggle from one focused on increasing autonomy into a struggle for independence.

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<sup>74</sup> Syed Abul Maksud, *Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani*, 2nd ed. (Agamee Prakashani, 2014), 366.



*Figure 1.1: Leaflet of an all-party conference regarding Independent East Pakistan called by Maulana Bhashani on January 9, 1971. The headline reads, “Fight, no compromise.” © Syed Irfanul Bari Collection, 2022. Used with permission*

On the other hand, March 26th was when the Pakistani military started their assault on Bengalis and the war started. In other words, the event of March 26 reflects what was imposed upon East Pakistan. From the viewpoint of Bhashani and others, it reflects less about the agency of the people. It does not reflect the resilience and the spirit of Bengali’s struggle for independence.

# Bhashani will launch stir to free East Pakistan

NEW DELHI, December 10.

**E**VEN as the victors of the general election waited for President Yahya Khan to take the next step in constitution-making, the pro-Peking National Awami Party leader, **Maulana Bhashani**, declared his intention to organise a movement for an independent East Pakistan.

The Yugoslav news agency, *Tanjug*, in a dispatch from Dacca, quoted **Maulana Bhashani** as saying that the election victory of the Awami League, headed by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, was an expression of the people's will "in favour of the independence of East Pakistan."

He also claimed that the poll outcome was a victory for his own party, which had constantly striven for "complete autonomy for East Pakistan." The party had not contested the general election.

ly. and brotherly relations with West Pakistan "as we have with Iran, Turkey or the Arabs."

He also said that if West Bengal seceded from India and wanted to join an independent East Pakistan, it would be welcome.

Reports from West Pakistan suggested that the Pakistan People's Party chief, Mr. Z. A. Bhutto, who has emerged as the main political force in that wing with his party capturing 81 of the 138 western seats, would next week meet Mr. Rahman, whose party has secured an absolute majority in the 300-member National Assembly.

Radio Pakistan said that Mr. Bhutto, after touring West Punjab and Sind, would visit East Pakistan next week to study the situation in the cyclone-hit areas.

## BHUTTO-RAHMAN TALKS

Informed sources said that a meeting between the two leaders could move

Figure 1.2 Times of India reporting on Bhashani's declaration to free East Pakistan © The Times of India, 2022.  
Used with permission

Another aspect of Haq Kotha's stance is challenging the government because they choose the date without seeking consent from the people. Unlike NAP, the ruling government AL accepted the election of 1970. By that point, NAP and AL had collaborated on several occasions and were considered allies, not rivals. There is also another possibility that rejecting the election by Bhashani was a conscious decision with the consent from both parties to weigh in all the votes of NAP to AL and secure the victory for East Pakistan's front. This was hinted at in a report by the Times of India. The Times of India reported Bhashani's rejection of the election in an article entitled

‘Bhashani will launch stir to free East Pakistan.’<sup>75</sup> According to this report, Bhashani told the Yugoslav news agency Tanjug that Sheikh Mujib’s (leader of AL) victory meant people favored independence and that he considered it a victory for NAP.

Even though Awami League played a crucial role, the party did not directly call for independence until the war broke out.<sup>76</sup> Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was pressured from many fronts including the leftists and other activists, to declare independence, and he indirectly declared it in his famous speech of March 7, 1971.<sup>77</sup> It is indirect because the negotiation between the military government and AL continued until the military assault began. Haq Kotha was pointing at this dilemma and hesitation. The weekly was criticizing this decision because it was imposed by the government and undermining the people’s choice. They chose this date because the party did not directly call for independence before that date. In the next issue, the weekly wrote about other political events that were significant, too.<sup>78</sup>

Here we can see Haq Kotha constructing an alternative history of the war, one that emphasized struggle and resistance of the people rather than the brutality of the Pakistani army. The Bhola cyclone and the election of 1970 was a complex series of events in which we can see different approaches taken by NAP and AL. It is also evident that there was some form of collaboration between these two parties. Even though NAP rejected the election, it also supported AL to run for the election, and AL did win with overwhelming support from the people. No party

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<sup>75</sup> The Times of India, “Bhashani Will Launch Stir to Free East Pakistan,” *The Times of India*, December 11, 1970, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>76</sup> It was declared on 26 March, 1971.

<sup>77</sup> Willem van Schendel, “East Pakistani Livelihoods,” in *A History of Bangladesh*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 152, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108684644>.

<sup>78</sup> Haq Kotha, “Amader Swadhinata Kobe?-2,” *Haq Kotha*, March 17, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

denies the significance of the Bhola cyclone, but the difference is one narrative makes it the center of their narrative and the other just recognizes it as a tragic incident. Haq Kotha argues the cyclone was the point from which the separation became the main purpose, and AL's victory was not a step towards provincial autonomy anymore but a step towards independence. On the other hand, AL's narrative was emphasizing the assault was the point when independence became inevitable.

### **The fate of freedom fighters and enemy collaborators**

Before the weekly got banned in September of 1972, it engaged with two major topics that illustrate the complexities and power dynamics following the war. These are the conditions of freedom fighters and war collaborators after the war. Haq Kotha never shied away from covering the post-war condition of the freedom fighters. It covered several stories of the mistreatment of freedom fighters and the abuse of power. In the 6th issue, for example, the weekly published a feature titled "Freedom for the Freedom Fighters."<sup>79</sup> The article described the mistreatment of the fighters perpetuated throughout the country by different government officials or government-backed individuals.

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<sup>79</sup> Haq Kotha, "Muktibahinir Mukti," *Haq Kotha*, April 2, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

# হক কথা

১৯ শে চৈত্র, রবিবার

## মুক্তিবাহিনীর মুক্তি

দেশ মুক্ত হইলেও মুক্তিবাহিনী মুক্তি লাভ করে  
নাই। তাহারা সন্দেহ, অপবাদ, অবহেলা,  
হয়রানি ইত্যাদির বেড়া জালে আবদ্ধ। সরকার  
ও সরকার সমর্থক মহল বিশেষ মুক্তিবাহিনীর  
দল উপদলের প্রতি কটাক্ষ করিয়া চলিয়াছেন,  
ইহা সর্বজনবিদিত। এই কটাক্ষ গুরুতর  
পরিণতির ইঙ্গিতদান করে কিনা, আমরা তাহা  
জানি না। কিন্তু উহা নিঃসন্দেহে বহু লোকের  
অন্তঃকরণ আহত করে।

স্বাধীনতা সংগ্রাম চলাকালে বাংলাদেশবাসী  
তথা বিশ্বজনতা অস্থায়ী সরকারের প্রতি নয়,

Figure 1.3 News published on the mistreatment of the freedom fighters.” © Syed Irfanul Bari Collection, 2022. Used with permission

It claimed that many freedom fighters did not receive any aid because of their political affiliation or as vocal opponents of the government. While admitting some may have been involved in crimes like robbery, the feature elaborated how many freedom fighters are now out of jobs and facing poverty. While describing the justification for looking after them, Haq Kotha added another reason that connected freedom fighters with the people rather than the government. During the war, people did not rely on the provisional government in India that commanded from a distance. However, it was the armed freedom fighters, whether they were trained soldiers or simple farmers, whose spontaneous resistance inside the country brought the Pakistani armies to their knees. People from all over the world listened to the freedom fighters’ struggle through the radio. This is also in a way acknowledging that the war was not entirely led by the interim AL government;

instead, there were other groups and classes of freedom fighters who are now facing discrimination.

Haq Kotha also showed significant concerns regarding “enemy collaborators.” There are several reports by Haq Kotha that reveal the identity of what they term “enemy collaborators,” defined as those who committed heinous crimes against the Bengalis during the war. Since the reports came from different accounts, it offered a vast range of cases. One central theme was to show how some collaborators not only escaped adjudication but secured important positions or joined the ruling party. Haq Kotha started reporting these incidents early on. In eight different issues, Haq Kotha published reports on this issue. The weekly reports that it received news from around the country about war collaborators and criminals being pardoned by either government officials or political leaders.<sup>80</sup> It also reported that some collaborators were granted their ‘character certificate’ in exchange for money. This pattern does not change much throughout Haq Kotha’s lifespan.<sup>81</sup> It is noticeable that most of the war collaborators who made this switch were from the upper ranks of their political party or belonged to the privileged classes. A representative example is that of a professor from Dhaka University who was an enemy collaborator during the war that then became a central figure within the ruling party’s student wing.<sup>82</sup>

The topic of “enemy collaborators” was a frequent topic in the letter section as well. Haq Kotha had a dedicated letter section where it published letters from readers. One exciting report was a letter written by a former captain of the Pakistan army who was discharged dishonorably for not obeying the military command and refusing to take part in the massacres during the war of

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<sup>80</sup> Haq Kotha, “Mujibbadi Dalal,” *Haq Kotha*, April 16, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>81</sup> Haq Kotha, “Jamati Dalaler Nirapad Ashroy Awami League,” *Haq Kotha*, September 1, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>82</sup> Haq Kotha, “Dalal Adhyapok,” *Haq Kotha*, June 30, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

1971.<sup>83</sup> The former captain wrote about an enemy collaborator responsible for massacres in Shibpur during the war that subsequently went on to hold an important government position. The weekly published more letters and reports of how enemy collaborators were bribing government officials. This letter is a wonderful example of the post-war political situation in Bangladesh, and will be further discussed later in this thesis.

Articles and letters like these reflect the power dynamics at play surrounding the war during the formation of a new ruling class. This new transformation was also a dividing issue among war veterans and war collaborators. This new formation of state power had different priorities that allowed persecution of war veterans and empowered war criminals.

### **End of the war and a dubious ally**

Just as there were multiple interpretations of when and why the war broke out, there was also a debate surrounding how the war of independence ended. This is a common theme that would arise whenever there was a discussion about the war in Haq Kotha. While reporting corruption and other misdeeds done by the authorities, the weekly often reminded its readers of what independence should be like. Several articles and news reports claimed either the war had not ended yet or that the war with Pakistan may have ended, but the struggle for liberation had yet to be achieved. Haq Kotha also pointed out that while dealing with the old problems of discrimination and social justice, the country continued to face new challenges to people's liberty. Describing freedom as incomplete, it is now facing a new obstacle from the the country's ally during the war, India.

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<sup>83</sup> Haq Kotha, "Pathan Captain Er Chithi," *Haq Kotha*, May 26, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.



In the seventh issue where the weekly talked about what constitutes freedom fighters' freedom published another article that describes the weekly's view on how the war ended. One article entitled "Only Blood was Shed, but no Revolution Happened" talked about how many people lost their lives in the war, despite the fact that the revolution they dreamed of never came.<sup>84</sup> The article claimed that what was happening in the political sphere of Bangladesh were the works of the counterrevolutionaries. The article indicated that Awami League had taken over the government and reported state corruption and mismanagement. It also claimed that AL was maintaining the old infrastructure and allowing the same kind of misuse of power the Bengalis experienced before independence. The article mentions that from the beginning of March 1971, people were ready for the revolution. However, the condition people faced after the war proved the revolution was incomplete. The government thus played the role of counterrevolutionary, with the endorsement of India. The article finished with a grave warning of more bloodshed and declared that Bangladesh might have become a separate nation, but that the revolution did not happen.

A handful of articles in the newspaper show skepticism behind India's intentions in Bangladesh while also recognizing how crucial their assistance was in the struggle for independence. Haq Kotha highlighted the geopolitical position and reasons behind India's role. It described the Indian government's aid not as a selfless act, but one that comes with considerable strings attached. It specifically pointed out how India wanted to control the conflict by selecting who could be deemed freedom fighters. In the eleventh issue, Haq Kotha reported a comment made by Maulana Bhashani in Mymensingh on May 7, 1972. The comment was a reply to a

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<sup>84</sup> Haq Kotha, "Raktapat Ghateche Kintu Biplob Hoyini," *Haq Kotha*, April 2, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

statement made by pro-Moscow leftists who claimed to have sacrificed themselves and brought victory. Maulana replied:

“It is the farmers and workers who sacrificed the most. They fought the war, gave shelter, and fed the guerilla fighters while risking everything. However, they are now being deprived of their rights. That does not mean I was the one who brought liberation. When Bangladesh got its independence, Sheikh Mujib was imprisoned in Pindi, Pakistan, and on the other hand, I was imprisoned in India. Only Indira’s government can tell why I could not go and join the war while Mojaffar and Moni Sing roamed free in India.”<sup>85</sup>

Although there were rumors, this was the first time Bhashani publicly revealed that he was imprisoned in India during the war. Imprisoning Bhashani, a national leader, was a serious accusation, and it exemplifies India’s complex role during the war. There are some obvious reasons why the Indian government saw Bhashani as a threat. Notably, Bhashani had a prominent religious and political following in Assam and led movements there, especially among the Muslim Bengali communities. Maulana Bhashani also advocated for the unification of Bengal, wherein West Bengal, Assam, and Tripura would join with East Bengal and become an independent country. This was a genuine concern for India even before the war broke out. During the election of 1970, India preferred an AL-led government over an independent Bangladesh because a secessionist East Bengal might seek to create a United Bengal in association with West Bengal which was also likely to fall under the control of pro-China communists.<sup>86</sup> Maulana Bhashani certainly favored both of these ideas. This concern was severe enough that it was reported in India. The report of Times of

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<sup>85</sup> Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani, “Ami Sedin Bharat-e Bondi,” *Haq Kotha*, May 12, 1972.

<sup>86</sup> Srinath Raghavan, “The Neighbor,” in *1971: A Global History of the Creation of Bangladesh* (Harvard University Press, 2013), 56, <https://doi.org/10.4159/harvard.9780674731295.c3>.

India, which covered Bhashani's declaration of seceding from East Pakistan in December 1970, also quoted Reuters's reporting of the statement. Maulana Bhashani said they would welcome West Bengal if they seceded from India and joined independent East Pakistan.<sup>87</sup> After independence, Bhashani kept advocating this unification. At the end of 1972, the Communist Party of India (CPM) in West Bengal was showered with questions about this topic. It escalated after Maulana Bhashani told the prime minister of Bangladesh about the possibility of a united Bengal. Many Marxists leaders of West Bengal contacted NAP for this purpose.<sup>88</sup> CPM denied having such intentions. On top of that, Bhashani's close ties with Maoists and the rise of Naxalites made him and his followers more dangerous for India. So, it was not surprising that India would want to keep Bhashani and his followers under their control.

In the twelfth issue, the weekly published another article directly addressing how India was involved in the war.<sup>89</sup> The article starts by mentioning how the people of India selflessly helped during the war, but then went on to describe the government's actions as not the same. It also addressed how leftist freedom fighters or partisans were persecuted and that Maulana Bhashani was put on house arrest by the Indian government. The article then mentioned some of the business agreements that were done by the provisional government of Bangladesh with India after the war. Haq Kotha claimed these agreements were not fair to Bangladesh, and these are examples of India's imperialism which resembled Soviet expansionism. The article asked a complicated question: without the aid of India, would the war have been won so quickly and how should Bangladesh show gratitude? It also asked what might be compromised in doing so? The answer

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<sup>87</sup> The Times of India, "Bhashani Will Launch Stir to Free East Pakistan."

<sup>88</sup> The Times of India, "CPM against NAP Call for Greater Bengal," *The Times of India*, September 6, 1972, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>89</sup> Haq Kotha, "Keno Bharat Sarkar Amader Shwadinata Sangram e Egiye Elen?," *Haq Kotha*, May 19, 1972.

to these questions, according to the Haq Kotha was that acknowledgement of India's support could not come at the expense of Bangladesh's sovereignty.

References to the war are so common in Haq Kotha that it would be misleading for one to only count the articles that directly addressed the war. Many issues were connected to the war and the role of freedom fighters. The case of Major Jalil<sup>90</sup> is another significant one that not only reflects the crisis some freedom fighters were facing but also the new complications Bangladesh was facing from India. This issue of Major Jalil will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. To Haq Kotha, it is more than just a tragedy; it is part of a continuous struggle. This case reflects a different perspective and adds nuance about the war. Haq Kotha reconfirms that in the liberation war of Bangladesh, there was not one single force fighting for freedom. However, several forces had a different understanding of freedom, which sometimes also contradicted each other.

The war might have been recognized similarly, but the interpretation is quite different. First, Haq Kotha's war narrative focused more on what happened to the people than the authority. The articles always highlighted people's sacrifices that usually ranged from people who fought in the war to the Indians who helped the refugees. On the other hand, it always had a skeptical tone while dealing with authority. No government or authority from any side was spared from skepticism, if not brutal criticism. This is why Haq Kotha was so vocal about not letting the people choose their Independence Day. The war broke out not because the Pakistani military attacked unarmed civilians but because the Bengali people were fighting for independence much before the Bhola cyclone.

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<sup>90</sup> Haq Kotha, "Major Jalil Samachar Shweta-Patra Chai," *Haq Kotha*, April 16, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

Haq Kotha saw the war as incomplete because it failed to instigate the revolution. The main reasons behind this failure are the class position of AL and India's role. It saw the new government becoming counter revolutionary and viewed it as reproducing structures of exploitation similar to other imperial forces. Haq Kotha saw no change happening regarding the relation with authority and the people. This attitude was later solidified in Maulana Bhashani and Maoist groups like Siraj Sikder. Just a year later in 1973, Siraj Sikdar's Maoist party called for a "Hartal" or strike on December 16, the victory day of Bangladesh. The strike was endorsed by Maulana Bhashani and was observed successfully.<sup>91</sup> The logic behind calling a strike on victory day was simple, the freedom was yet to be achieved for the people. Haq Kotha's framing of freedom can be linked with demands Maulana Bhashani and NAP made in the fourteen points. The differences between the demands of AL and NAP were similar to issues that Haq Kotha was dealing with after the war. Those demands reemerged when Haq Kotha discussed independence. It was concerned about having elections and an autonomous government, but it also had other demands like anti-imperialism, anti-corruption, and restricting private property and rights for working class people.

AL's seven points and NAP's fourteen points demands reflect the dissimilarities of the two party's approach for an independent Bengal. It confirms Layli Uddin's conclusion that Bhashani and NAP possessed political spaces and constituencies that were not completely encapsulated or accommodated within the politics practiced by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman or the Awami League.<sup>92</sup> Even though the parties were allies before the war, this difference made the two parties parted.

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<sup>91</sup> Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani, "1973 Er 16 December Hartal Palon-e Maulana Bhashanir Bibriti," December 2, 1973, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>92</sup> Uddin, "In the Land of Eternal Eid."

Even after the independence, the reflection of AL and NAP's demands was aligned with their dispute.

Haq Kotha's reporting about the suffering of freedom fighters as well as the pardoning of certain enemy collaborators marks the decline of Bengali nationalism. After independence, when there was no foreign force directly colonizing or reenforcing colonial power, the necessity of such nationalism decreased. This can also be seen as an indication of social class becoming the dominant factor in Bangladesh's political sphere. Pardoning war collaborators for money or social status and persecuting anyone who shows dissent, were an indication of "the movements from above" at play that Haq Kotha described as counterrevolutionary.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Haq Kotha and the State: Putting a Leash on Power**

When Haq Kotha started publishing, using media to show dissent against the government was not unfamiliar as a strategy. This chapter argues that Haq Kotha can be considered a continuation of a tradition where news media played a role in showing dissent and mobilizing people against state authority. It examines this phenomenon as connected to the British period and thriving after the partition. Nevertheless, Haq Kotha holds a unique position in how it operated and whom it targeted as its readers. This chapter explores Haq Kotha's bittersweet battle with the government while the new Bangladeshi state was forming. It shows how Haq Kotha understood the state that was gradually taking shape and the particular issues that caused this transformation. This chapter also covers how media was used to create an infrastructure of dissent against authority, particularly by Maulana Bhashani and his constituency. This chapter will show Haq Kotha's role in the public sphere and how it functioned to engage the state.

#### **Building an infrastructure of dissent**

Bengali print media has been used to show dissent in Bengal almost as soon as newspapers started printing during the British colonial era.<sup>93</sup> Initially, its center was Calcutta, the capital of Bengal province. These papers had less outreach in East Bengal, and it is also a logical assumption

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<sup>93</sup> Arani Basu, "History of Media in Bengal: A Chronological Overview," *Transcience : A Journal of Global Studies* 4, no. 1 (2013): 13.

that print media had less appeal among working-class people where the majority did not have access to education. Nevertheless, we can see that these groups of people did not completely abandon print media; instead, it too became a common medium to disseminate information and build collective dissent over time.

Before discussing how Maulana Bhashani's persistence in print media helped build an infrastructure of dissent, it is necessary to clarify what is meant by the term. An infrastructure of dissent is "the means through which activists develop political communities capable of learning, communicating and mobilizing together."<sup>94</sup> In Maulana Bhashani's long political career, advancing dissent against state authority was one of his major concerns. This attitude probably derived from his criticism and skepticism of power and state authority. Maulana Bhashani was very clear about the necessity of holding whoever is in power accountable, and he meant to deal with it as harshly as possible. As he famously said in a speech,

"No matter how good a horse is, it cannot be controlled without the reins and the whips. Whether the government is run by Awami League or National Awami Party, or any other party with a different ideology, it cannot run properly without the leash, which is the peoples' opinion. We must hold this leash firmly".<sup>95</sup>

It did not seem that this attitude towards power was very common among Bhashani's contemporary politicians. Maulana Bhashani was among a handful that acknowledged that power should be dealt with cautiously no matter who is holding it. Bhashani's political life strongly reflects this belief. He became known as a de-facto leader of the opposition who opposed the state

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<sup>94</sup> Alan Sears, *The Next New Left: The History of the Future* (Black Point, Nova Scotia: Fernwood Publishing, 2014).

<sup>95</sup> Saed Ur Rahman, *Maulana Bhashani Er Bhashon O Bibriti* (Dhaka: Jagriti Prakashoni, 2000).



even when his party was in power. Maulana Bhashani's critical view towards power itself made him initiate projects to keep power in check. These political projects included *Mela* (rural Bengali festival), farmer- workers associations, unions, and newspapers.

Maulana Bhashani started utilizing print media to garner dissent from an early period of his political career. His involvement in print media varied from patronizing, producing, and even collecting subscribers. This practice can be traced back to the British period. Bhashani's earliest involvement with newspapers was in 1916 when he worked for the newspaper *Al-Islam*.<sup>96</sup> He was involved in circulating and managing readers for the paper in Assam, where he mobilized Bengali Muslim workers against the racist "Line system" and against the expulsion of Bengali Muslims from the land.

Although there is a lack of evidence but there is another paper called "Prajashakti" (meaning "Power of the People") was mentioned which started publishing in 1928. Maulana Bhashani himself was the editor of this paper. Bhashani started the paper immediately when he returned to Tangail.<sup>97</sup> This newspaper focused on reporting misdeeds and abuses of zamindars (landlords) and mahajans (money lenders). Maulana Bhashani was particularly vital in running this paper, because other newspapers could not openly publish such news. *Prajashakti* used to be run with the help of many contributors under the banner of Maulana Bhashani. *Prajashakti* showed Bhashani's clear interest in using print media to disseminate knowledge and mobilize the people against authority. In the case of *Prajashakti*, the mobilization was more radical in nature.

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<sup>96</sup> Salek, *Maulana Bhashanir Haq Kotha Samagra*, i-vii.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid*

After the partition in Pakistan, Maulana Bhashani launched another newspaper that had a wider impact in East Pakistan. After founding the opposition party in Pakistan, Awami Muslim League (which later became Awami League), Bhashani again felt the need to open a newspaper. Bhashani founded Weekly Ittefaq in 1949, which later became a daily where he was initially the editor and publisher.<sup>98</sup> He remained the publisher until he resigned from Awami League. Daily Ittefaq became very popular in East Pakistan for its rigorous criticism of the state. During the Pakistan era, Daily Ittefaq saw its peak and, as a result, it faced oppression from the state. It got banned and restricted more than once by the Pakistan regime. It was first banned in 1954, its editor was issued an arrest warrant in 1956, and it was banned again in 1966. Each time, the government accused it of publishing something contentious against the government and disobeying restrictive orders. When Ittefaq was shut down, the event was covered by the international media. This shows the popularity it had and the backlash against its ban. Even papers like the New York Times, South China Morning Post,<sup>99</sup> and Times of India<sup>100</sup> reported the shutting down of Ittefaq and the arrest of its editor. Daily Ittefaq, however, was different from Haq Kotha in terms of structure and its style of operation. It used to run like a traditional newspaper, and it was patronized directly by the Awami League. It was also a Dhaka-based newspaper, with readers mostly from the urban middle class.

The pattern of Maulana Bhashani's political strategy in publishing is reflected strongly in this experience. Whenever a significant shift or set of changes happened in the arena of politics, such as the creation of a new political opposition party or the rumblings of independence

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<sup>98</sup>Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> South China Morning Post, "Warrant For Arrest Of Editor: Karachi," *South China Morning Post*, May 7, 1956.

<sup>100</sup> The Times of India, "'DICTATORSHIP' IN PAKISTAN: Leader's Charge," *The Times of India*, October 8, 1954, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

movements, Bhashani used print media to disseminate information and create a firm infrastructure of dissent. All previous attempts of print media like Prajashakti or Ittefaq had different reader bases and regions than that of Bhashani's media outlets. However, each of them was specifically focused on mobilizing people politically and increasing the people's agency. Ittefaq achieved nationwide popularity. It played a crucial role as the newspaper of the opposition of the government in East Pakistan. This pattern matches Haq Kotha and explains why Maulana Bhashani started Haq Kotha immediately after he arrived in Bangladesh after the war. Therefore, Haq Kotha can be regarded as a continuation of Maulana Bhashani's attempts to create a robust infrastructure of dissent mainly designed to address the state or authority.

### **Haq Kotha and the government**

One of the main objectives of Haq Kotha was to hold the government accountable. A typical issue of Haq Kotha would dedicate a significant portion of its pages to either address or to criticize the government. The weekly's concerns can be divided into a few categories. It did not only consist of hard news regarding the government; it also consisted of articles, opinions, and even poems addressing either how the government was failing or how the imagined state was far from materializing. Haq Kotha's coverage regarding the government or forming the state contained news about both internal affairs and foreign affairs. It focused on the new government's actions and inactions affecting its citizens. The foreign affairs section emphasized the influences of foreign powers within the country, specifically that of India, the United States, and Russia, detailing the government's relation with these countries.

In Haq Kotha, news on the government's internal affairs and news about the country focused on misdeeds, the abuse of power, and the government's failure to take proper action. Haq

Kotha seemed to focus on how the state's broken infrastructure created different power vacuums which gave rise to abuse of power and allowed leaders to get away with corruption. Haq Kotha emphasized the fact that a new ruling class was forming and questioned the people's role in this process. This was portrayed through different themes. For example, it pointed its readers' attention to the new authority and how it was functioning. The weekly would often draw similarities and contrasts with previous rulers. In this process of dissecting the new ruling class, it tried to figure out who was becoming the privileged and who the marginalized. It asked critical questions like who made decisions, who obtained more privileges, which parties were getting away with corruption and which were facing discrimination.

### **Independence for whom?**

As mentioned earlier, one theme that emerged quite frequently while addressing the government was that of independence. The weekly questioned what independence meant. In the second issue of Haq Kotha, the main headline was "Independence for whom? For the toiling mass or for the obsequious bureaucrats."<sup>101</sup> The article states, "We have spilled our blood for whose independence? Is it for the landlord, the moneylenders and the corrupt, bribe-taking bureaucrats? Or is it for the landless farmers and workers? The actions of the last two months taken by the government and its supporters suggest it is not for the freedom of farmers and workers."<sup>102</sup> Here, the weekly warns its readers that even though the country has just gotten its independence, not everyone enjoys the same proportion of freedom. The newspaper warned that certain people in charge of the government's important positions were taking advantage of their power and looting

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<sup>101</sup> Haq Kotha, "Swadhinota Kar? Sharbohara Janatar Na Mosaheb Amlar?," *Haq Kotha*, March 3, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

the peoples' resources. The news again emphasized Maulana Bhashani's speech about the necessity of making people in power accountable. The news specifically targeted those who gained important positions not by their skill but by their social or political connection with the ruling party. The news claimed that the system is falling because of this favoritism and nepotism, and the people are still suffering.

Another article in the same issue clarified what they were trying to say. It was titled "What will happen to them?"<sup>103</sup> It examined the poor condition of different professions like farmers, fishers, workers, boatmen, weavers and more. The article was written in response to the government's promise to take care of farmers. The article pointed out that other unprivileged people were also facing a crisis. The article argues that they were the ones who fought the war and helped the freedom fighters to bring independence. However, they were not being treated equally while others became rich overnight. The article also acknowledged that president Sheikh Mujibur Rahman gave hope to the farmers. At this point even though Haq Kotha was critical about the AL government, it also acknowledged that the government did have the intention to improve citizens' lives. However, it also added "words are not reflecting reality".<sup>104</sup> It then took its reader's attention to the fishermen and boatmen's poor conditions and asked the government to take proper steps to ameliorate their situation of poverty. After the war, there was a massive food shortage, famine, and other crises; these marginalized people were facing a deplorable situation. There were little to no resources allocated to ensure their social and financial security. Interestingly, in earlier issues like this, Haq Kotha was skeptical about how the government was going to govern. However, it did not oppose it or call an end to the government. The tone of the writing was harsh, but intended

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<sup>103</sup> Haq Kotha, "Eder Barat E Ki Jutbe?," March 3, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

more as a warning. These reports did not only detail the harsh conditions people were facing in general, but it also pointed out the suffering of particular groups, like the fishermen and boatmen.

### **Who will write the constitution?**

The constitution is another issue through which Haq Kotha questioned the legitimacy and intentions of the state. In the fourth issue, the weekly published an article that questioned who was assigned the task of composing the constitution.<sup>105</sup> The article argued that the new constitution based on Awami League's famous six-point demands did not make any significant change from the way the state of Pakistan used to run. The constitution failed to bring fundamental change to the state, limiting its potential to bring economic equality and ensure freedom of speech. The article heavily criticized the government for not taking into account the peoples' opinions and freedom fighters' counsel while making the constitution. The article reminded its readers of the rise of Napoleon after the French Revolution. It warned that Bangladesh might see a similar situation if the constitution did not ensure freedom of expression and economic security for the lower classes. This again reflected the contrast between the Awami League's six-point program and the National Awami Party's fourteen points program. The six-point program ensured sovereignty, but was unable to bring social revolution, according to the weekly.

Anthropologist Dina Siddiqi wrote a paper on the constitution of Bangladesh that also addressed what Haq Kotha was arguing here. She pointed out some important features during the constitution making process, such as the fact that it was drafted and adopted in a very short amount

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<sup>105</sup> Haq Kotha, "Shashontantra Pranayan Korbe Kara?," *Haq Kotha*, March 17, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

of time.<sup>106</sup> The Drafting Committee was tasked in April of 1972 to finish the draft within only two months and the parliament formally adopted the constitution by 16 December 1972. Siddiqi mentioned this fast-paced process left it open to censure from different groups. Another notable aspect she pointed out was the overwhelming number of Awami League representatives in the constitutional assembly. This imbalance of the Assembly raised questions regarding autonomy, credibility, and representativeness. Especially when most of the representatives to the committee were members of the Assembly, selected during the election of 1970. Siddiqi rightly asked if they could still claim to represent the people's will in 1972 when the whole political situation had shifted.<sup>107</sup> She also added that the AL members claimed this constitution as the end product of a long 25-year-old conversation with the people of East Bengal/East Pakistan. According to their logic, the Constitution was the product of the Awami League, a clear expression of the hopes and aspirations of the people of Bengal. Dina Siddiqi pointed out the teleology that emerged, as the lines between 'The People' and the Awami League were systematically blurred.

The same topic became the headline of the seventh issue.<sup>108</sup> Quoting from Maulana Bhashani's speech, the issue declared how the process of forming the constitution was not acceptable. The report stated that the people would not accept the constitution as long as it did not clearly outline how it would deal with class exploitation. Maulana Bhashani also demanded the state create an appropriate and robust opposition party to keep the government in check. He also demanded freedom of press to criticize the state whenever necessary. These declarations confirmed

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<sup>106</sup> Dina M. Siddiqi, "Secular Quests, National Others: Revisiting Bangladesh's Constituent Assembly Debates," *Asian Affairs* 49, no. 2 (April 3, 2018): 242–43, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03068374.2018.1470793>.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Haq Kotha, "Shashontantra Manbo Na Jodi," *Haq Kotha*, April 9, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

what Maulana Bhashani thought about the role of the press. Neither Bhashani nor Haq Kotha hid their belief that the press's role was to report what was happening and to be the strongest critic of the state. The argument they used in favor of freedom of speech was that it was not a mere human right. Very straightforwardly, they demanded freedom of speech for the sake of critiquing the state and forcing its accountability. In other words, they wanted the freedom to show dissent. The same issue came into focus again in its tenth edition with an even harsher tone.<sup>109</sup>

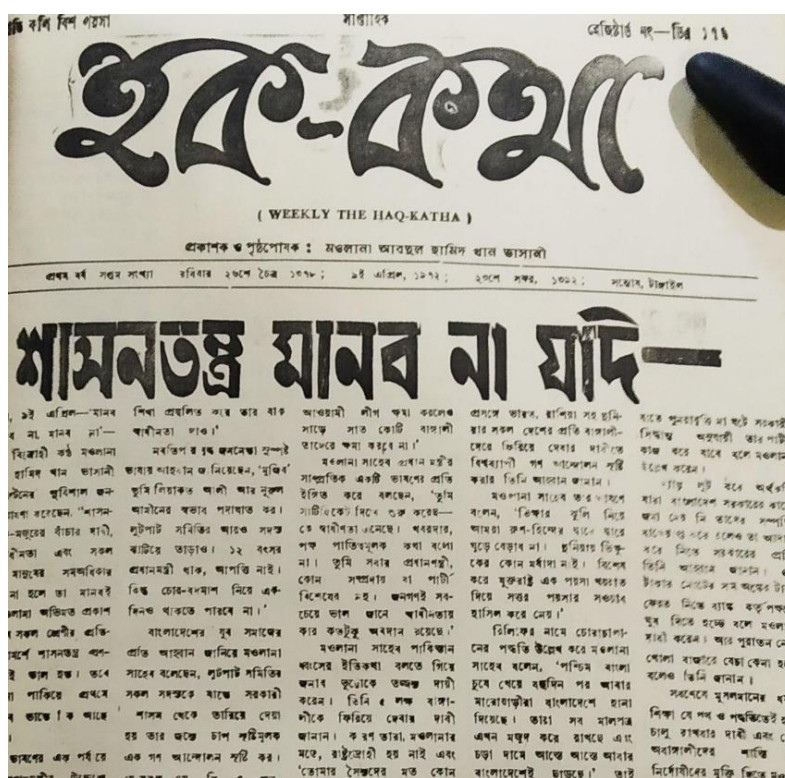


Figure 2.1: Headline of the seventh issue, “We will not accept the constitution if-” © Syed Irfanul Bari Collection, 2022. Used with permission

<sup>109</sup> Haq Kotha, “Potaka Urate Hobe?,” *Haq Kotha*, April 30, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.



It was clear that both Maulana Bhashani and Haq Kotha saw this formation of the new constitution as favorable only to a particular class and group of people, which was anything but democratic. Their urgency was visible in Haq Kotha's rigorous follow-up reports and in the speeches of Bhashani. This firm stance did not go unnoticed in the international press, as well. It was even featured by the presses that favored the new government. On October 11, the Times of India published news with the headline "Bhashani's new stand on framing the constitution."<sup>110</sup> Addressing Bhashani as "pro-Peking", the news stated that Maulana Bhashani challenged the assembly members' right to frame a constitution and demanded an all-party national collaboration. Times of India gave Bhashani's statement much importance, probably because he also gave hints about the possibility of Maulana Bhashani and his party's participation in the next election. The report added that the nonagenarian leader's party was willing to participate in the next election, given that the constitution provided a fair election and equal opportunity to every party. The report also highlighted Maulana Bhashani's comment that the current government used "fascist methods" to throttle the opposition.

### **Dealing with durbhikkha**

In the history of Bengal, *durbhikkha*, or famine, is a much-feared threat and a recurring disaster. The word itself has particular resonance in Bengal, where famines have caused significant destruction and loss of lives. During World War II, in 1943, it was in Bengal where an infamous famine took place, devastatingly taking the lives of three million people. The British Empire was blamed for the huge death toll.<sup>111</sup> Before that, the great famine of the 1770s had cost the lives of

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<sup>110</sup> Kirit Bhaumik, "Bhashani's New Stand on Framing Constitution," *The Times of India*, October 11, 1972, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>111</sup> Madhusree Mukerjee, *Churchill's Secret War: The British Empire and the Ravaging of India during World War II* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

around 10 million people and this too was a famine of human origin.<sup>112</sup> The Bhola cyclone in 1970 may have been a natural disaster, but the crisis that followed, including a famine, was worsened because of the Pakistani government's reluctance to acknowledge the crisis. As mentioned before, this negligence caused the rejection of the election by NAP in 1970. The NAP declared after the event that their only goal would be independence from Pakistan. So, it is understandable why famine was not taken lightly after the war. After the war ended, the crisis of food and shelter was everywhere. The combination of the Bhola cyclone disaster and nine months of brutal war made the situation for the people of post-independent Bangladesh horrific. Haq Kotha argued that the government's mismanagement of the disaster and the corruption of government-sponsored parties were making the situation much worse, resulting in a large-scale famine. Throughout the thirty issues from February to September of 1972, a significant portion of the weekly's news was related to relief distribution. Reports of people suffering and starving to death were also intertwined with this reporting.

In the third issue, the weekly warned against famine.<sup>113</sup> In an article by Maulana Bhashani himself, entitled "Stop the upcoming famine," he reported,

"I have seen people marching for many causes. People march for their ideology, for patriotism or for justice. Every procession can be halted with speeches. However, only food

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<sup>112</sup> Vinita Damodaran, "Famine in Bengal: A Comparison of the 1770 Famine in Bengal and the 1897 Famine in Chotanagpur," *The Medieval History Journal* 10, no. 1–2 (October 1, 2006): 143–81, <https://doi.org/10.1177/097194580701000206>.

<sup>113</sup> Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani, "Ashanna Maha-Durbhikkha Radh Korun," *Haq Kotha*, March 10, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

can stop the procession by the hungry. Not even the Zamzam water (holy water from Mecca) can stop the fire created by hunger.”<sup>114</sup>

In this article, Maulana Bhashani wrote about the disaster people were facing all over the country, and criticized the relief sent by the state as not enough. In addition, he argued, these relief efforts were delayed and mishandled. The article also stated that the people were still suffering and subject to exploitation just like the Zamindars had exploited them during the British period and by the chairman and government officers during the Pakistan period. In the article, Maulana Bhashani reminded the reading public of the catastrophic famines Bengal had faced in the past.

Famine again became the headline of the weekly in its twelfth issue.<sup>115</sup> In this issue, Haq Kotha published a long and elaborate report highlighting the rising problems related to famine. The report showed poor conditions countrywide and how each day the number of people starving to death was increasing. The weekly argued that the situation was getting so gruesome that even the newspapers known to be pro-government could no longer ignore the crisis. The report highlighted news reports from other newspapers and argued that the reality was much worse than what these other reports claimed. The report also highlighted the rising number of suicides related to the crisis. To show the degree of misery people were experiencing, it referred to several cases reported in other newspapers. These tragic cases made the report more humane and subjective, beyond statistics and data. The weekly blamed the government and their negligence.

The fear of famine increased because of the continuous mismanagement and corruption of the state while distributing the relief resources. Relief became another theme connected with how

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Haq Kotha, “Anahare Manush Morche,” *Haq Kotha*, May 19, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

the government handled the famine crisis and the international politics of relief. Haq Kotha published several reports dealing with how the relief program was being misused or exploited from an international platform.<sup>116</sup> These reports showed how other countries and government-supported parties profited from the relief program, and it also argued that relief was being used as a means to control the masses. The weekly argued that international relief efforts were a gateway for powerful countries like the USA, Russia, and India to penetrate and influence Third World countries. The weekly feared these interventions, in the areas of politics, economy, and even defense forces, might lead to a civil war.

The failure to distribute the relief and the expanding famine crisis culminated in a mass *bhukha-michil*, or procession of the hungry. Maulana Bhashani called for a procession of the hungry and a nationwide *hartal*, or strike, on September 3, 1972. The weekly also mentioned that seventeen other political and worker-student organizations supported the strike. It did not mention the names of the organizations but gave the impression that they were leftist or left-leaning organizations politically aligned with Bhashani. Haq Kotha ran the strike as its headline for the twenty-seventh issue, published just two days before the procession happened.<sup>117</sup> At that point, the weekly had taken a much harsher position towards the government. The newspaper justified the strike by showing the state's mass corruption and arguing that the upper class was still getting richer despite the ongoing crisis. Even though neither Bhashani nor the weekly called for the overthrow of the government, it openly stated that the state should ask for forgiveness for their misdeeds and stop foreign aggression before it would be too late. Foreign aggression or

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<sup>116</sup> Haq Kotha, "Manobik Relief Er Pashobik Rup," *Haq Kotha*, June 9, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>117</sup> Haq Kotha, "Nipirito Anshanbandi Jago," *Haq Kotha*, September 1, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

interference, especially by India, Russia, and the USA, was also one of the main focuses of Haq Kotha, which it considered intertwined with the role of the state.

### **Haq Kotha on foreign policy, intervention, and expansionism**

Another key focus of Haq Kotha was foreign policy, in particular with powerful countries. It often showed skepticism and gave warnings about foreign intervention by these countries. The issues of foreign policy and its influence, often framed as imperialism or neo-colonialism, created much polarization in Bengali politics since Pakistan's creation. NAP's politics had a firm stance regarding foreign interference intertwined with the sovereignty of the land. Moreover, foreign policy was one of the primary reasons behind the split of the Awami League and the creation of the National Awami Party (NAP) in 1957. When Husein Suhrawardy of Awami League, then elected president of Pakistan, and his cabinet supported the US-backed Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) and Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), there was public backlash. Maulana Bhashani and the left-wing of the Awami league strongly opposed this military pact. This debate on foreign policy ultimately led to a split deep enough for Bhashani to resign from the party and create NAP with the leftists.<sup>118</sup>

Maulana Bhashani's emphasis on countering foreign aggression was visible throughout his post-partition politics. This firm stance was seen more clearly by his involvement with the Non-Alignment Movement and his close connections with an international network of anti-imperial activists. Maulana Bhashani and NAP attended the famous Tricontinental Conference in Havana, Cuba, in 1966. The conference provided a platform for non-aligned countries and anti-imperialist organizations to connect and exchange ideas. Records show that Maulana Bhashani met other

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<sup>118</sup> Maksud, *Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani*, 159-213.

revolutionary leaders like Fidel Castro at the conference.<sup>119</sup> Furthermore, a recent finding reveals that he was also one of the editors of the famous international magazine *Revolution: Africa Asia Latin America*.<sup>120</sup> The war of 1971 could also be considered part of a series of ongoing proxy wars between the USA and the USSR. The USA openly supported and assisted Pakistan, whereas the USSR and India supported Bangladesh.<sup>121</sup> China indirectly supported Pakistan because of its geopolitical rivalry with India.<sup>122</sup> China's absence of direct support created more complexities among various Maoist groups in East Pakistan. Although many Maoist groups fought directly in the war of 1971, like Siraj Sikdar's Sarbahara Party, factions like Muhammad Toaha-Sukhendu Dastider refused to participate.<sup>123</sup> After the war, all these countries implemented different strategies to increase their influence. The country that most was reported on for its neo-colonial impulses in Haq Kotha was India.

During the Cold War, the two giants USA and USSR, naturally attracted the most public attention. Maulana Bhashani and NAP were against American imperialism and foreign policy from the beginning. Haq Kotha showed severe distrust and scrutiny towards the USA because of its direct support and assistance to Pakistan during the independence war and the role of the US in the Vietnam war, a topic which Haq Kotha regularly continued to follow. So, when the US formally recognized Bangladesh on April 4, 1972, it also attracted the weekly's attention. In its

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid, 244-288.

<sup>120</sup> Layli Uddin, "Revolution: Malcolm X and Maulana Bhashani," *خاموش-Khamosh!* (blog), November 17, 2020, <https://layliuddin.wordpress.com/2020/11/17/revolution-malcolm-x-and-maulana-bhashani/>.

<sup>121</sup> Srinath Raghavan, *1971: A Global History of the Creation of Bangladesh, 1971* (Harvard University Press, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.4159/harvard.9780674731295>.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid

<sup>123</sup> Md. Nurul Amin, "Maoism in Bangladesh: The Case of the East Bengal Sarbohara Party," *Asian Survey* 26, no. 7 (1986): 759–73, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2644210>.

ninth issue, the lead news story was about Henry Kissinger's possible secret visit to Bangladesh.<sup>124</sup> The report showed a calculation of Henry Kissinger's whereabouts based on a Soviet news source. It showed the possibility of a secret visit by Kissinger to Bangladesh a day before the USA recognized the country. The report threw open the question of whether this meant that the US had found their way to penetrate the country. Also, in August, when it featured an article on anti-imperialism, it mentioned the USA's attempts, like SEATO, to control the region through military and economic power, asserting that the superpower was again trying to apply similar tactics.<sup>125</sup> The US had influence in the region through supporting the Pakistani government. This backfired when Bangladesh won the war with the help of India and the Soviet Union. So, the weekly speculated that this could be the US's attempt to regain connection and influence with the new ruling class of the region.

China is probably the country that made Haq Kotha most uncomfortable. Maulana Bhashani was known as pro-Peking, and even met with Mao Tse Tung and Chou En-Lai.<sup>126</sup> So when China sided with Pakistan, it must have been a hard blow for Bhashani and NAP. Although many Maoist groups fought in the war, this did create a split.<sup>127</sup> Haq Kotha did not ignore this issue and mentioned China's role while discussing geopolitical dominance and aggression by powerful countries. However, China received less criticism from Haq Kotha than its counterparts. So, in August, when other media said China might veto Bangladesh's membership in the United Nations,

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<sup>124</sup> Haq Kotha, "Dhaka E Kissinger Er Gopon Safar?," *Haq Kotha*, April 23, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>125</sup> Haq Kotha, "Samrajjobad Birodhi Lorai Jordar Korte Hobe," *Haq Kotha*, August 11, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>126</sup> Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani, *Mao Tse Tung Er Desh E* (Samhati, 2020).

<sup>127</sup> Amin, "Maoism in Bangladesh," 1986.

Maulana Bhashani posted a statement in Haq Kotha's twenty-fifth issue.<sup>128</sup> The statement, in an article entitled "Bhashani's appeal to China," declared it an extreme matter of sorrow that China would issue such threats and also urged the Chinese government to support Bangladesh's membership. In the next issue, the weekly featured a report on the same issue.<sup>129</sup> In the article, it asked why China might veto the membership of Bangladesh. The story tried to dissect possible reasons why China might veto the membership and to which matters the government should pay attention. The article criticized China's role during the war and added concerns about Russia and India's dominance in the region. It also elaborated the effect of Russia and India's imperialism at play. It concluded that China might veto on the grounds that Bangladesh was a puppet country controlled by Russia-India.

The newspaper kept close eyes on the state's affairs with Russia and India among the big countries. The Soviet-India coalition directly helped during the war and had a close relation with Awami League. The pro-Moscow faction of the National Awami Party or NAP (M) split from NAP and sided with Awami League before the war broke off. They became a strong alliance after independence.<sup>130</sup> Although Haq Kotha gave more attention to reporting on India, that did not mean the activities of the Soviet Union went unnoticed. Haq Kotha criticized US president Richard Nixon's visit to the Soviet Union and blamed Russians for greeting the president that was waging war in Vietnam.<sup>131</sup> The article focused on Russia's silence on Vietnam and focused on their dominance over other countries, calling it imperialist. It warned of Russia's intentions in

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<sup>128</sup> Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani, "Chine Er Prati Bhashanir Abedon," *Haq Kotha*, August 18, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>129</sup> Haq Kotha, "Chin Veto Debe Kina?," *Haq Kotha*, August 25, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>130</sup> Haider Akbar Khan Rono, *Shatabdi Periyē*, 5th ed., 2012.

<sup>131</sup> Aurangzeb Chowdhury, "Russia Ey Nixon: Vietnam e Boma," *Haq Kotha*, June 2, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.



Bangladesh even though formally the USSR appeared to be a friendly ally of Bangladesh. The weekly argued a great deal about the position of the Soviet Union. It also criticized the pro-Moscow communists in supporting oppression and fascism instead of establishing actual socialism. Haq Kotha's impressions of the Soviet model of socialism will be discussed further in the next chapter. Haq Kotha showed distrust in trade agreements and in diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. This was apparent when they reported Russia's deal to clean up the Chittagong port mines.<sup>132</sup> Skepticism was also visible when the Russians offered medical assistance to president Sheikh Mujib when he fell ill in London.<sup>133</sup> Furthermore, Soviet influence was associated with several cases regarding India.

India was the most helpful ally to Bangladesh during the independence war. When the war broke out, around 100,00,000 people took refuge in India.<sup>134</sup> The Indian government assisted the Provisional Government of Bangladesh in coordinating the war efforts and seeking international support. It was on December 3, 1971, when India officially joined the war and helped the 'Muktibahini' or freedom fighters to liberate the country from the Pakistani army.<sup>135</sup> On December 16, the Pakistan army officially surrendered, and the war came to an end. There is no denying that the war would have ended very differently without India's assistance. Nevertheless, India's role had many layers. As discussed in the previous chapter, there were some concerns about India's reluctance to include leftists who came to India to join the freedom fighters. The Indian government also was cautious about Maulana Bhashani. When the war broke out, Bhashani

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<sup>132</sup> Haq Kotha, "Russiar Sathe Chattagram Niye Ditiyabar Kabinnama Holo," *Haq Kotha*, July 28, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>133</sup> Haq Kotha, "Election Operation?," *Haq Kotha*, August 18, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>134</sup> Raghavan, 1971.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid

crossed the border to India and joined the Provisional Government of Bangladesh. There were even complaints about the disappearances of leftists from the camps in India and the fact that India had kept Maulana Bhashani under house arrest.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, India feared Maulana Bhashani would mobilize people and create a strong resistance movement. He had a large base of followers in Assam and good connection with other Maoists. Bhashani was treated with hospitality, but was under house arrest. This claim was later supported and reinforced by the Haq Kotha.<sup>136</sup> It is not surprising that India had a very tenuous relationship with China, and Maulana Bhashani was known as pro-Peking. As mentioned in chapter one, Haq Kotha saw India's position in the war very critically without denying its contributions to the independence of Bangladesh. Concerning the post-independence situation, this critical view turned into a fear of expansionism. As we will see further, Haq Kotha saw India's involvement as part of India-Russia's neo-colonialist project. This approach eventually turned out to be the primary reason the weekly would be banned by the government.

Although subtle, distrust and skepticism towards India were visible from the very first issue. In an article titled 'Did independent Bangladesh establish an independent government'?<sup>137</sup> the weekly described what should be the duties and role of the state and the government, writing,

"It is natural to presume an independent country will have an independent government.

However, in reality, it is challenging to remain an independent government. Because of neo-colonialism, there are many kinds of obstructions for small countries. It is difficult to

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<sup>136</sup> Bhashani, "Ami Sedin Bharat-e Bondi."

<sup>137</sup> Haq Kotha, "Swadhin Bangladesh E Swadhincheta Sarkar Pratishthito Hoyeche Ki?," *Haq Kotha*, February 25, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

ignore their ‘friendly claws’ and even more challenging to digest once you accept them.

Therefore, it is necessary to have an independent government. Only time will tell if Bangladesh was able to establish one.”<sup>138</sup>

This article clearly shows the newspaper’s skepticism towards big and powerful countries, and it is clear which countries the article was indicating. This is not surprising, given the context of the Cold War. The weekly framed foreign intervention or aid as the friendly claw. This framing shows the inescapability of the big countries’ reach, interference which could come in the guise of aid. Even when friendly, a claw is still a claw. By 1972, many countries from the global south had seen firsthand that these claws of interference by powerful countries could soon turn hostile. Hence, we see alliances like the Non-Aligned Movement and the Tricontinental emerging alongside more radical groups with strong opinions about these superpowers’ neo-colonialist approaches.<sup>139</sup>

The third most significant issue that Haq Kotha brought to the attention of its readers in order to put pressure on the state was regarding the port of Chittagong. This port was part of an important trade route with wider international implications. During the war, it was utterly ravaged by the Pakistani army.<sup>140</sup> The weekly claimed there has been an ongoing international conspiracy to make the port of Chittagong commercially irrelevant. The weekly did not mention the conspiring country’s name, but mentioned that it was a neighboring country. In the same issue, another article

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid

<sup>139</sup> Peter Willetts, *The Non-Aligned Movement: The Origins of a Third World Alliance* (London : New York: F. Pinter ; Nichols Pub. Co, 1978).

<sup>140</sup> Haq Kotha, “Antarjatic Chakranto Chalche?,” *Haq Kotha*, March 10, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

described Bangladesh's geopolitical significance in regard to South East Asia.<sup>141</sup> The article described how India, Russia, the US, and China were, directly and indirectly, involved in the war. It explained how these countries would continue to push their influence and try to control the fate of Bangladesh. It also argued that the people should be part of the process of determining foreign policy. Haq Kotha published a similar anti-colonial statement in a piece that featured Maulana Bhashani's speech of April 2, 'Slave of nobody.'<sup>142</sup> The speech was in response to the Prime Minister's comment on exterminating Naxalites, the maoist radicals inspired by the Naxal movement of India. The report highlighted how Maulana Bhashani emphasized that Bangladesh will never bow down to any superpower, whether the US, Russia, India, or even China. At this stage, it seemed like Haq Kotha was warning its reader about the potential dangers of foreign interventions. While it did not directly point to or blame any country specifically, it continued to argue that people should be aware of the potential dangers represented by superpowers in general. This is how this weekly framed the necessity of foreign policy. It showed skepticism towards every superpower, even countries who helped during the war. In other words, one of the central features of the weekly from its beginning was a critical take on foreign assistance. It questioned the intention and politics of foreign aid.

As the country's situation kept deteriorating, the weekly's concentration became more focused on India. In particular, it placed emphasis on issues surrounding foreign policy and the nature of the relationship with India. These mostly referred to trade deals and geopolitical influences. For example, it brought peoples' attention to the infamous Farakka barrage in its tenth

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<sup>141</sup> Haq Kotha, "Bangladesh O Dakhin-Purba Asia," *Haq Kotha*, 10 March 19972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>142</sup> Haq Kotha, "Karo Golami Noy," *Haq Kotha*, April 2, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

issue.<sup>143</sup> The Farakka barrage was built across the Ganga River in West Bengal during the Pakistani period. The barrage controlled the water river, which flowed over Bangladesh to the Bay of Bengal. The barrage enabled West Bengal to control this river's water flow, putting agriculture-based Bangladesh in a vulnerable position. The article described the devastation this barrage would bring upon the people and its natural agricultural balance. The article pushed this narrative and questioned the intention of the pro-India politicians who were advocating for the barrage. The issue of the Farraka barrage would continue in future publications and eventually became a strong and significant movement against Indian domination.<sup>144</sup>

The presence of Indian soldiers and accusations of misconduct and looting in Bangladesh was another primary reason for tensions between Bangladesh and India.<sup>145</sup> One story that reflects the significant impact of this matter is that of Major Mohammad Abdul Jalil. Major Jalil was a celebrated freedom fighter who was the Mukti Bahini Sector Commander of Sector 9. Major Jalil was also politically vocal and left-leaning. However, his relationship with the Indian army started a controversy. In December 1971, after the end of the independence war, it was said that Major Jalil tried to stop the Indian army from looting factories, hospitals, and other facilities. As a response, the Indian army arrested Major Jalil on charges of 'misconduct.'<sup>146</sup> Haq Kotha ran headlines in its eighth issue about the arrest and disappearance of Major Jalil.<sup>147</sup> When it was published, people still had little idea why and by whom he was arrested. The report highlighted

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<sup>143</sup> Haq Kotha, "Farakka Badher Her Fer," *Haq Kotha*, April 30, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>144</sup> Maksud, *Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani*, 535-541.

<sup>145</sup> Willem van Schendel, "A State Is Born," in *A History of Bangladesh*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 199, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108684644>.

<sup>146</sup> Rounaq Jahan, "Bangladesh in 1972: Nation Building in a New State," *Asian Survey* 13, no. 2 (1973): 199–210, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2642736>.

<sup>147</sup> Haq Kotha, "Major Jalil Samachar Shweta-Patra Chai."

Major Jalil's role during the war and claimed that he should be celebrated as a hero. The report featured a letter from Major Jalil's mother, Mosammat Rabeya Khatun, to president Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. She urged him to release her son and serve justice. The report highlighted the questionable motives of the Indian army and argued that India would continue to try looting or to control independent Bangladesh.

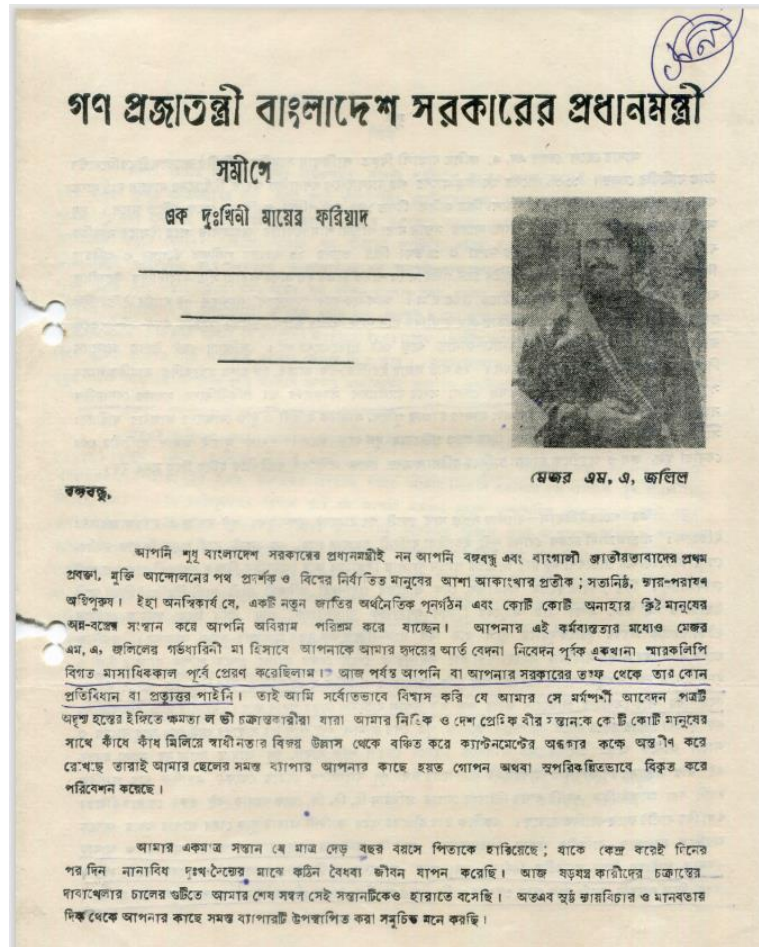


Figure 2.2 Open letter to the Prime Minister by Major Jalil's mother published in Haq Kotha © Syed Irfanul Bari Collection, 2022. Used with permission

Interestingly, the weekly did not demand the immediate release of Major Jalil. Instead, it demanded a detailed description of why he was arrested and what had happened. At that point it

was not clear if he was arrested by the Indian army or by the Bangladeshi government. In other words, it asked the government to be accountable for the disappearance of Major Jalil and to admit whether it was due to the influence of India. After this incident, Major Jalil would later become another influential figure in the politics of Bangladesh. He would become a founding member of another left-wing political party, the Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JASAD), or the National Socialist Party of Bangladesh. JASAD was formed in 1972 through a split from the Awami League's student-led Chatra League.<sup>148</sup>

By the time Haq Kotha featured Major Jalil's disappearance, news of looting and exploitation by the Indian army and people in business became rampant in the weekly. India's penetration of the Bangladeshi market was highlighted early on.<sup>149</sup> However, news of industries or businesses getting destroyed because of Indian influence started growing. For example, in the same issue that demanded an explanation of Major Jalil's arrest, the weekly also reported news of Bangladesh's declining leather industry.<sup>150</sup> It reported that the leather industry was facing this disaster because of the smuggling of leathers by Indian businessmen. The report stated that at least 20-25 lakh Taka or around twenty-six thousand USD worth of leather goods had been illegally smuggled to India. It claimed that Indian businessmen were not following government mandated rates. The weekly also published op-eds,<sup>151</sup> which described business deals with India and showed the loopholes or unequal terms from which India would benefit at the expense of Bangladeshi business. There were also reports of looting and smuggling of goods to India through air transport

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<sup>148</sup> Ali Riaz, ed., *Bangladesh: A Political History since Independence* (I.B. Tauris, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350985452>.

<sup>149</sup> Haq Kotha, "Bharotio Truck," *Haq Kotha*, March 3, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>150</sup> Haq Kotha, "Amader Chamrao Niye Jacche," *Haq Kotha*, April 16, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>151</sup> Ahmad Shah Reza, "Bharat Bangladesh Banijjik Chukti," *Haq Kotha*, May 12, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

to maintain secrecy or the aggression by Indian non-Bengali people in business penetrating the Bangladeshi market.<sup>152</sup> India's interest in having a profitable trade relation with East Bengal was present even before an independent Bangladesh was on the table. During the election of 1970, one of the reasons India favored an AL government was because it thought this would open up the possibility to revive the trade links between India and East Pakistan which were suspended by the India-Pakistan war of 1965.<sup>153</sup> As time progressed, news of Indian businesses taking over Bangladeshi markets became more frequent in *Haq Kotha*.

Another concern that will be revisited further in the third chapter was the *Haq Kotha*'s claim of the ongoing persecution of leftists throughout the country. Reports of torturing and killing leftists by the police or the members of the ruling party all over the country became a significant issue in *Haq Kotha*. As shown before, *Haq Kotha* saw persecuting leftists as a joint effort by the Bangladeshi and the Indian government. In the sixteenth issue, it featured news about a conspiracy to kill Maulana Bhashani.<sup>154</sup> After publishing this issue, the editor Syed Irfanul Bari was arrested by the police. After Bari's arrest, Bhashani took on the role of the editor and the weekly continued to publish. The arrest did not seem to halt the weekly; instead, it increased reporting about the actions of the government and interventions from India. Syed Irfanul Bari's arrest was also a turning point for *Haq Kotha*. After that, news on corruption and Indian influence in the country became more frequent with stronger and harsher language. For example, in the next issue, which featured Syed Irfanul Bari's arrest thoroughly,<sup>155</sup> Maulana Bhashani also wrote a column titled

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<sup>152</sup> *Haq Kotha*, "Chorachalaner Akashpath Khule Geche," *Haq Kotha*, June 11, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>153</sup> Raghavan, "The Neighbor."

<sup>154</sup> *Haq Kotha*, "Bhashani Ke Hotta Kora Hobe?," *Haq Kotha*, June 16, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>155</sup> *Haq Kotha*, "Haq Kotha Sampadok Greptar," *Haq Kotha*, June 11, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.



‘We will not accept the constitution dictated by Delhi.’<sup>156</sup> In the column, Maulana questioned why the government was seeking Delhi’s assistance to form the constitution instead of that of its people. At this point, the weekly started blaming the government for becoming undemocratic and of collaboration with Indian domination more directly.



Figure 2.3 Headline of Issue seventeen ‘Editor of Haq Kotha arrested! A naked attack by the Mujib democracy’ © Syed Irfanul Bari Collection, 2022. Used with permission

The reports were not only about business deals and looting. Haq Kotha also reported on Indian army interventions inside the country. The weekly saw the presence of the Indian army as a direct threat to the sovereignty of the nation. For example, in the twelfth issue, the weekly

<sup>156</sup> Haq Kotha, “Delhi Er Shasokgoshtthir Nirdeshe Pranito Shasantantra Manbo Na,” *Haq Kotha*, June 11, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

reported that the Indian army was sighted in Rajshahi district.<sup>157</sup> Yet the Indian Embassy claimed they had Indian soldiers only in Chittagong at the request of the government of Bangladesh. The report claimed the Indian army joined the Police and Bangladesh Rifles force in Rajshahi, a paramilitary border patrol group derived from former East Pakistan Rifles army members, who were already engaged in finding and executing Naxalites and other leftists. The report also claimed that innocent people were being targeted for torture and arson. Another example can be seen in the twenty-fifth issue whereby the weekly reports Indian bandits terrorizing Bangladeshi residents.<sup>158</sup>

These publications were issued at the same time that Chittagong Port and Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) conflicts started to intensify. In the same issue that featured the news of their editor being arrested, Haq Kotha also reported India's attempt to take over control of Chittagong Port.<sup>159</sup> It reported that the shipping corporation was slowly being dominated by India. In the next issue, Haq Kotha made the Chittagong Hill tracts its lead news story.<sup>160</sup> The news stated,

“Murder, rape, arson, looting and mass arrest is happening to the innocent people of CHT by the armed forces of the government with the assistance of the Indian army. The government is showing extreme violence against these indigenous groups and rupturing the peace and harmony that once existed. The AL became hostile towards these tribes ever

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<sup>157</sup> Haq Kotha, “Rajshahi Er Grame Bhrarotiyo Soinno,” *Haq Kotha*, May 19, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>158</sup> Haq Kotha, “Dhamoir Thanay Bharotiyo Durbrittoder Douratto,” *Haq Kotha*, August 18, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>159</sup> Haq Kotha, “Bangladesh E Shipping Gore Othar Biruddhe Bharotio Chokranto,” *Haq Kotha*, June 11, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>160</sup> Haq Kotha, “Parbotto Chottogram E Ganahatma Cholche,” *Haq Kotha*, June 30, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

since the Chakma King Tridib Roy stood for election (in 1970) opposing the AL and became a member of the National Assembly.”<sup>161</sup>

The news claimed the state was conducting genocide on the indigenous people of the CHT. Haq Kotha accused the government of justifying this persecution by demonstrating collaboration with the Pakistanis during the war. The weekly further claimed this genocide and torture of innocent people was being executed by the government with the assistance of the Indian army. The news also included notes on the natural resources and geopolitical significance of the area, as the reason for attracting so much attention from India. Just like reports on Indian business strategy, reports of the Indian army in Bangladesh also grew.

The news about CHT, particularly on what was happening with indigenous people, was very important and needs more context to understand its gravity. Historically CHT was inhabited by different non-Bengali indigenous peoples, with very few non-tribal people from the plains.<sup>162</sup> There are around a dozen ethnic groups, with the Chakma, the Marma and the Tripura the larger groups. The Pakistani government altered CHT’s special status from “excluded area” to “Tribal area” which CHT obtained during the British period in order to exploit its natural resources.<sup>163</sup> The special status the indigenous people had was also stripped away with the support of Bengali elite

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Shapan Adnan, “Migration, Discrimination and Land Alienation: Social and Historical Perspectives on the Ethnic Conflict in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh,” *Contemporary Perspectives* 1, no. 2 (December 1, 2007): 6–10, <https://doi.org/10.1177/223080750700100201>.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

and businessmen. It is noteworthy that the indigenous people of CHT were excluded from both of the ‘imagined communities’ of Pakistan and Bangladeshi nations.<sup>164</sup>

So, during the war in 1971, most of the indigenous groups remained indifferent. Only two of the three traditional chiefs (Rajas) of the indigenous peoples chose to remain loyal to the Pakistani state and a few small bands accompanied the Pakistani military against Bengalis.<sup>165</sup> Yet, this limited collaboration by a small minority provided a widespread misconception that all indigenous people of CHT were against the Bengali struggle for liberation and ignited ethnic conflicts against them. After independence, when Sheikh Mujibur Rahman came to Dhaka in January, 1972, two delegations from CHT went to visit him to share their grievances and seek protection. Unfortunately, the government gave no assurance regarding protection against misconstrued ‘revenge’ killings by armed Bengalis, as well as their demand to be recognized as distinct cultural groups with separate identities with equal identities. On the contrary, it is reported that Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman advised them to ‘become Bengali’ and assimilate themselves into the nation-state of Bangladesh.<sup>166</sup> The indigenous group formed a political party in March 1972 to protect their rights and interests. The new constitution, which was officially adopted in November 1972, imposed a common ‘Bengali identity’ on all groups inhabiting the country, irrespective of their linguistic and ethnic differences.

Indigenous people in CHT were facing conflicts without any protection or assurance from the government when Haq Kotha published the news in June 1972. According to Adnan during

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<sup>164</sup> Amena Mohsin, “The Politics of Nationalism : The Case of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh.” (Ph.D., University of Cambridge, 1995), <https://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?uin=uk.bl.ethos.388423>.

<sup>165</sup> Adnan, “Migration, Discrimination and Land Alienation.”

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

this time a state of low intensity warfare prevailed in CHT. Haq Kotha reported these oppressions not only because it reinforced the argument against the negligence of the government, but also because it evidenced assistance from India. Haq Kotha saw this ethnic conflict as manufactured by the ruling party in order to gain control of the land and its resources.

The last issues of Haq Kotha had more contentious news than ever before in its history. The weekly openly criticized the government and blamed it for being corrupt and helping foreign forces dominate the country and exploit its people.<sup>167</sup> In the last issues, news and articles on state violence and Indian involvement dominated the whole paper. The headline news of the last four issues show clearly that Haq Kotha was not planning to soften its stance towards the state. In its twenty-seventh issue, it declared the 'March of the hunger' in response to famine.<sup>168</sup> The next issue's lead news was "Djinn disappearing government files,"<sup>169</sup> which featured ongoing disappearances and mismanagement of government documents related to corruption and assisting espionage for foreign spies. The twenty-ninth issue's lead news was on the arrival of Dr. Adam Malik of Indonesia.<sup>170</sup> The weekly spared no words in criticizing Dr Malik's arrival. It reminded its reader about the genocide of communists that took place in Indonesia. Haq Kotha questioned the government's intentions regarding Dr Malik's arrival and described his visit like Caesar's, "I come, I saw, and I conquer.' This visit was seen as another indication that Bangladesh's socialist

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<sup>167</sup> Haq Kotha, "Shei Gopon Satti Chukti," *Haq Kotha*, September 22, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>168</sup> Haq Kotha, "Nipirito Anshanbandi Jago."

<sup>169</sup> Haq Kotha, "Sarkari Dalilpatre Djinn Er Hat Legeche," *Haq Kotha*, September 8, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>170</sup> Haq Kotha, "Samajtantrik Raktapipashu Dr. Adam Malik Elen Dekhlen Joy Kore Nilen.," *Haq Kotha*, September 15, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

vision was fading away. It should be mentioned that these issues also contained more contentious news and articles that featured corruption by the state and neo-colonialist efforts by India.

However, the news that got Haq Kotha banned was their thirtieth issue's lead story. The news headline read, "The seven secret deals- Who is the deceiver, Mr Tajuddin? The people or you?"<sup>171</sup> This news featured the seven agreements between the Indian government and the Awami League's interim government during the war. The news claimed these deals were done in secret and that the government kept the deals secret after the war. Haq Kotha claimed these deals were directly contradictory to the democratic values of independent Bangladesh and opposed to the sovereignty of the country. They included agreements like creating a paramilitary force in which India would have the ability to intervene or refer, having foreign policies and trade deals favorable to and approved by India, and more. The complete seven agreements are given in the appendices.

The weekly spared no criticism of this agreement. It claimed that Bangladesh would no longer be an independent nation under such agreements, which it claimed made Bangladesh a puppet country controlled by India. It added that Bangladesh was on the verge of becoming a 'slave' of India and Russia.<sup>172</sup> It also claimed that the people of Bangladesh would not tolerate such changes. The report ended with the following statement, "If Bangladesh signs its slave treaty to India, then the state has to face the wrath of people and answer them."

In the same issue, Haq Kotha featured another speech by Maulana Bhashani.<sup>173</sup> In the speech, Bhashani argues that people would take matters into their own hands if the government

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<sup>171</sup> Haq Kotha, "Shei Gopon Satti Chukti."

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Haq Kotha, "Bharat-Russia Er Kabar Rochona Koro," *Haq Kotha*, September 22, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

did not take action against rampant corruption. In the speech, Maulana Bhashani also talked about India's exploitation of the country and asked the people to abolish and create graves for this India-Russia domination. The last issue also contained another column that stated that Indians and pro-Moscow forces were attempting to shut down the weekly Haq Kotha because it revealed international conspiracies. Their fear turned out to be true, because that was the last issue Haq Kotha published before it was banned by the state.

## ***Jehad threat*** ***by Bhashani***

DACCA, September 28: The pro-China National Awami Party leader, Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani, today announced that he would launch a mass movement against the government in the Ramzan month and if necessary, declare a "jehad to stop fascist actions" of the present Awami League government.

Reacting to the banning by the government of his party's mouth piece "Haq Kotha" and two other weeklies, the Maulana said it was a clear demonstration of the government's "undemocratic" attitude towards the people and the freedom of the press.

He told a rally of his party's student wing Biplobi Chatra Union that he would go out to each of the country's thana and urge the people to rise against the government for its "failures and anti-people actions."

The Maulana throughout his speech maintained his "anti-Indian tirade" and alleged that Indian business men were trying to exploit the Bangladesh people.

Figure 2.4 Times of India's report on the banishment of Haq Kotha © Syed Irfanul Bari Collection, 2022. Used with permission

The ban on Haq Kotha made news in India, too. Times of India reported the incident with the title “Five anti-India weeklies given notice in Bangla.”<sup>174</sup> The report stated that Maulana Bhashani’s Haq Kotha had been banned for their consistent anti-Indian view. The report also accused the weekly of being pro-Chinese and similar to the propaganda of Radio Pakistan. The other four weekly’s Mukhopatra, The Spokesman, Lal Pataka, and Banglar Mukh faced similar charges. The report also mentioned the arrest of the editor, but on the charge of collaborating with Pakistan. Interestingly, the report said that Haq Kotha was anti-Indian and addressed the weekly as against the freedom of Bangladesh. These reports also indicate that even Indian newspapers were convinced that Haq Kotha was banned because of its “anti-Indian sentiment.” When Times of India did a follow-up report on Maulana Bhashani, the report titled ‘Jehad threat by Bhashani’ stated that Maulana Bhashani called this banishment a threat to freedom of expression.<sup>175</sup> It featured Bhashani as a potential threat for the government and India, as he openly threatened to launch a mass movement by the people.

This chapter discusses Haq Kotha’s battle with the state, divided into two broad categories. First was Haq Kotha’s understanding and coverage of how the state and its government functioned to run the country. Second, was Haq Kotha’s understanding and coverage of foreign policy and foreign intervention. It is difficult to determine which category was given more attention since these two categories were often intertwined. However, the weekly’s main focus was on state corruption and Indian influence. It seemed like the weekly faced more problems by criticizing the

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<sup>174</sup> Kirit Bhaumik, “Five Anti-India Weeklies given Notice in Bangla: The Times of India News Service,” *The Times of India*, September 14, 1972, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>175</sup> Kirit The Times of India, “Jehad Threat by Bhashani,” *The Times of India*, September 29, 1972, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.



government's foreign policy than its internal politics. The distrust of the superpowers and fear of neo-colonialism were most vibrant.

It was very critical of the formation of the constitution. It saw creating the constitution without any kind of referendum as a way of the ruling party solidifying power. News of corruption, miscarriage of justice, and failure to handle crises like the famine created more distrust towards the government. This was more visible for the indigenous people of CHT who faced violence by the Bengalis on one hand and were stripped of their ethnic identity by the constitution. It was also very skeptical about the government's foreign policy, particularly with respect to India. It is noteworthy to look at when the newspaper was banned. The weekly faced no problem from the government when it criticized its actions or inactions regarding domestic issues. Its editor got arrested and later it got banned only when the newspaper published news criticizing India's involvement. Time of India's report also stated that the main reason behind banning Haq Kotha and other four papers is for being anti-Indian. So, it is apparent that at that point criticizing or writing against India was a more severe danger from the government's perspective.

## Chapter Three

### **Haq Kotha's Ideological Segments: Knitting together Islam, Communal Harmony, and Socialism**

As a radical paper openly advocating socialism, Haq Kotha had some unique views regarding ideology. The newspaper engaged significantly with the practical themes of socialism in Bangladesh, as well as how ideological influences engaged with local aspects of religion and spirituality. Contrary to other forms of socialism, it did not reject religion altogether. Instead, Haq Kotha saw spirituality and socialism as not only mutually inclusive, but necessary ideological partners. In every issue of Haq Kotha, along with other news, there was a separate segment dedicated to religious and ideological topics. These segments focused on interpreting and raising awareness of religious values, which created a stark contrast with other socialist publications that often presented religion as a threat to establish socialism. The weekly also promoted communal harmony rigorously, using religious and spiritual concepts, a unique combination.

According to the constitution of 1972, the four principles of independent Bangladesh were nationalism, democracy, secularism, and socialism.<sup>176</sup> This chapter aims to examine how Haq Kotha understood and interpreted two fundamental principles on which the state was supposed to function: secularism and socialism. This chapter also identifies Haq Kotha's concerns about the functioning of socialism and why the weekly rejected other forms of socialist models, such as the Soviet model. This highlighted the newspaper's concern with religion, specifically Islam and how it fit into a society that was supposed to be socialist and anti-communal. In other words, it was not

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<sup>176</sup> Willem van Schendel, "A State Is Born," in *A History of Bangladesh*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 201, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108684644>.

limited to a discussion of ideology; it used religious values and language while describing, explaining, and advocating for political actions. It is apparent that Maulana Bhashani had the most influence on determining Haq Kotha's ideological stance. Haq Kotha endorsed Bhashani's political philosophy, evident in the weekly publications. To understand how Haq Kotha incorporated such an ideology, it is necessary to look into the contemporary political milieu and political phases that helped develop this kind of political philosophy, more specifically Maulana Bhashani's ideological endeavor that developed these concepts in such a way.

### **Political Incidents and Movements that influenced Haq Kotha's ideology: British colonialism and Hindu-Muslim communalism**

Bengal was the first region of the Indian subcontinent that was conquered by the British. In the beginning of the eighteenth century, the area which is now Bangladesh was called East Bengal. East Bengal was administered together with the three Indian states, West Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa, all under a single Governor. This had previously formed the eastern wing of the Mughal Empire. In 1765, authority over the Mughal provinces of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa was formally transferred to the East India Company. In the 1820s, these provinces became the eastern wing of the vast new British empire in India.<sup>177</sup> In the British period, the administrative system started to change dramatically, and communal tension started taking new shape. Although communal conflict can be traced back to before the colonial period, during the British rule, Hindu-Muslim division started to increase. The British authority used a divide and rule method as a political

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<sup>177</sup> P. J. Marshall, "The Setting for Empire," *Bengal: The British Bridgehead: Eastern India 1740–1828* (Cambridge University Press, March 1988), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CHOL9780521253307.002>.

strategy in order to increase their control over the region.<sup>178</sup> However, this nurturing of ethnically-divided communalism would have a grave impact on life on the subcontinent. Communalism was at the centre of many horrible and significant incidents including riots, genocide, mass migration, and, specifically, the partition of India in 1947, including the partition of Bengal.<sup>179</sup>

In the case of Bengal, the Muslim community faced considerable decline after the power shift from Mughal to British rule. Even though Muslims were the majority in terms of population, they held less wealth, power, and dominance than before. During this period, these changes in power equations created class antagonisms that aligned with Hindu-Muslim communal differences. This is how Badruddin Umar explains the communalization of the agrarian class struggle in East Bengal.<sup>180</sup> He explains that the demographic reality during the British period was that the majority of landlords and money-lenders in eastern Bengal were Hindu, while the majority of cultivating peasants were Muslim. Both the organized political movements in the region were led by sections of the landlord-bourgeois classes. Later, as Hindu members gained wider control of the Congress, the Muslim section gave birth to the Krishak Praja Party/Muslim League.<sup>181</sup> This meant that Muslims and lower-caste Hindus became the majority of the working class. In addition, the majority of the zamindar (landlords appointed by the British rule) in Bengal were Hindus. As a result, this Hindu-Muslim power imbalance created more complexities for the anti-colonial

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<sup>178</sup> Belkacem Belmekki, “Muslim Separatism in Post-Revolt India: A British Game of ‘Divide et Impera’?,” *Oriente Moderno* 94, no. 1 (2014): 113–24.

<sup>179</sup> Anwesha Roy, *Making Peace, Making Riots: Communalism and Communal Violence, Bengal 1940–1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108578790>.

<sup>180</sup> Badruddin Umar, *Chirasthayi Bandobaste Bangladesher Krishak* (Mawla Brothers, 1973).

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

movements. This communal tension would also be an influential factor during the anti-colonial movements in Bengal.

Anti-colonial movements in Bengal had different forms, and it is important not to generalize. Although anti-colonial and anti-communal forces were not always mutually inclusive, many movements did contain anti-communal features, as well. The early trend of peasant movements in Bengal against British colonialism was focused on land reform. Enhancement of land revenue was carried out by the colonial rulers. They accomplished it through various administrative experiments which initially encouraged replacement of the old zamindars by a new group of intermediaries who were allowed to indulge in the public auction of land.<sup>182</sup> As a result, the collection of land revenue increased four times between 1765 and 1784 for the East Indian Company. This was done with the help of these intermediaries who could be willingly ruthless. This enhancement ultimately affected the *ryots*, or the small peasant farmer. This created further opposition between the *ryots* and the other discontented classes and the colonial rulers and their new intermediaries. As Atis Dasgupta shows in his work, this was the trend of the anti-colonial movement in the early phase of colonialism in Bengal as evidenced by two examples of uprisings: the Fakir -Sannyasi uprisings and the Rangpur uprising of 1783.<sup>183</sup> The first movement was led by the Fakirs and Sannyasis. The Fakir-Sannyasi uprising is an example of early anti-colonial movements where we can see collaboration between Hind-Muslims instead of communal tension.

Over time, communal tensions began to dominate. According to Partha Chatterjee, peasant resistance did not necessarily take the form of an organized movement. In 1926-31, for example,

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<sup>182</sup> Atis Dasgupta, "Early Trends of Anti-Colonial Peasant Resistance in Bengal," *Social Scientist* 14, no. 4 (1986): 20–32, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3517178>.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid, 23

peasant resistance arose as a result of violent communal clashes.<sup>184</sup> These clashes were against Hindu landlords and money-lenders. These “riots” suggests quite clearly the more or less general character of the resistance among the predominantly Muslim peasantry of the region. The participants of these uprisings ideologically saw themselves as resisting the unjust exploitation and oppression of a peasant community orchestrated by the external enemies.<sup>185</sup>

The peasant resistance also took the form of acts of defiance against targets that symbolized the wealth and power of the dominant classes. This included plunder and destruction of property, widespread disobedience of “customary” cultural practices patronized by Hindu landlords or trading groups, desecration of idols worshiped in landlord households, and burning of bonds and records of loans. On the other hand, Hindu zamindars, traders, and professionals organized their strength with open political support from the Hindu Mahasabha and other quasi-political Hindu religious organizations.<sup>186</sup> As evidence, Chatterjee turns to the 1928 amendment to the Tenancy Act to show landlords’ interests were becoming aligned with organized Hindu politics. At the time of its passing, the amendment demonstrated clearly that the Congress-Swarajya Party in the legislature supported the rights and privileges of landlords against every attempt to voice the demands of tenants. It is noteworthy that the recurring demands during this tenant act movement were: (1) abolition of illegal exactions, (2) reduction of rent, (3) reduction of interest rates and relief from indebtedness, (4) “honourable treatment of Muslim tenants in the Zamindar’s office,”

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<sup>184</sup> Partha Chatterjee, “Agrarian Relations and Communalism in Bengal, 1926-1935,” in *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, vol. 1 (Delhi ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 9–38.

<sup>185</sup> Partha Chatterjee, “The Colonial State and Peasant Resistance in Bengal 1920-1947,” *Past & Present*, no. 110 (1986): 169–204.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid*, 185

and (5) abolition of the landlord's fee on transfers of raiyati land. Demand number four shows that Muslims faced unequal treatment by the zamindars.<sup>187</sup>

### **Anti-colonialism and Revivalism among Muslims**

During the colonial period, there were several uprisings and movements from Muslim communities. The main purpose of these movements was to revive Muslims economically, culturally, and politically. However, these movements were also diverse in nature. Some movements like the Aligarh movement, tried to reform the Muslim communities so they could integrate themselves with the new colonial system.<sup>188</sup> Reformers, particularly Syed Ahmed Barelvi, had significant influence on Muslim reforms. There were also movements like the Deoband which were more anti-colonial in nature. In Bengal, significant movements led by Muslims that had a large impact were the Fakir-Sannyasi uprising, resistance by Titumir, Faraizi movement and the Khelafat movement. Although the Fakir-Sannyasi uprising was not targeted only for Muslims or led by Muslims it was heavily influenced by Islamic Sufi ascetics. These movements either tried to revive the previous status of Muslims or were aimed at regaining political access and power. These movements were particularly important in context for Haq Kotha. Muslims' role in the anti-colonial struggle were often used as references in the articles of Haq Kotha while talking about communal harmony.

As mentioned earlier, the Fakir-Sannyasi uprising was part of the earliest series of rebellions against British colonialism. The land revenue experiments by the East India Company resulted in extractions from the peasantry and also replaced most of the old zamindars which

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid

<sup>188</sup> Syed Abul Maksud, *Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani*, 2nd ed. (Agamee Prakashani, 2014), 35.

included both Muslim and Hindu. They were replaced by a new group of intermediaries and sub-administrators.<sup>189</sup> These land reforms caused havoc for many peasants and other subordinates. The Fakir-Sannyasi rebellion started after the Bengal famine of 1770. These rebellions were led by Fakirs and Sannyasi who were monks or ascetics from both Muslim and Hindu communities. The Fakirs were from the Sufi sect of Madari and the Sannyasis were from the Hindu sect of Dasnami.<sup>190</sup> This rebellion actually saw unity of Hindus and Muslims. Among the leaders of the Muslim Fakirs and Hindu Sannyasis were included Majnu Shah, Bhavani Pathak, Musa Shah, Ganesh Giri, Cherag Ali, and Devi Chaudhurani.<sup>191</sup> Among these leaders, rebels like Majnu Shah and Bhabani Pathak were particularly significant. During this time there were many attacks on the East India Company or the landlords by the Fakirs and Sannyasis working in tandem. For example, in 1773, Majnu Shah led the Fakirs who joined the body of Sannyasis in the neighborhood in Dinajpur.<sup>192</sup> On 10 December 1782, a party of Sannyasis and Fakirs who were around 700 in number had assembled at Paradanga in Beterbund. In 1793, a combined party of the Fakirs and the Sannyasis was reported to have entered Rajshahi and plundered the properties of local landlords and money-lenders. The Fakir and Sannyasi rebellion started to decline after 1793 and their last insurrection took place in Dinajpur in 1800.

The resistance lead by Titu Mir was a peasant movement, but it was also driven by a strand of Muslim nationalism. The uprising of Titu Mir happened in West Bengal from 1827 to 1831.

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<sup>189</sup> Dasgupta, "Early Trends of Anti-Colonial Peasant Resistance in Bengal."

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Atis Dasgupta, "The Fakir and Sannyasi Rebellion," *Social Scientist* 10, no. 1 (1982): 44–55, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3517122>.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.



Titu Mir (1782-1831) was a disciple of Syed Ahmed Khan.<sup>193</sup><sup>194</sup> Titu Mir's movement was brief, but motivated by an urgent sense of social grievance. Unlike East Bengal, there were fewer Muslims in West Bengal. Titu Mir still used techniques, such as withholding *cesses*, or levies, used to support Hindu festivals like Durga Puja and disseminating a sense of common interest and grievance among the Muslim peasantry. He gave importance to Muslims treating each other as equals and also to distinguishing themselves from non-Muslims by attire. Even though the resistance was targeted towards the landlords and the British, it had a communal undertone.<sup>195</sup> In 1831, Titu Mir and his followers desecrated the temple of a Hindu landlord who had been particularly oppressive. The conflict led the British troops to join with the landlord. Titu Mir and his followers became popular for their resistance, especially the building of a huge bamboo fort. The resistance was eventually suppressed and Titu Mir was killed in 1831.<sup>196</sup>

Another important uprising was the Faraizi movement started by Shariatullah. The movement was known as Faraizi because of its insistence on maintaining the fundamental obligations of Islam. *Far* or *fara'iz* means an obligatory duty. According to Barbara Metcalf, the Faraizi were more radical in reform of custom,<sup>197</sup> however they were also more conservative in their jurisprudential position. Shariatullah prohibited the community Friday prayers and prayers on Eid. Shariatullah reasoned that the lack of a *misru 'l-jami*, a city where a *qazi* or Muslim ruler resided, justified their actions. However, the movement never called for armed resistance or jihad

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<sup>193</sup> Barbara D. Metcalf, "The 'Ulama in Transition: The Early Nineteenth Century," in *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 70–71, <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/33813>.

<sup>194</sup> Barbara D. Metcalf, "The 'Ulama in Transition: The Early Nineteenth Century," in *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 70–71, <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/33813>.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid, 69

against the British. In fact, the sect cooperated with the British to secure their own position, especially under Dudhu Miyan (1819-1862), the son and successor of Shariatullah. Dudhu Miyan organized each district where the sect had members under a locally based khalifah who taught, levied subscriptions, and protected the interests of the members. However, the sect was successful to some extent in the British courts where they defended their interests against the landlords and of British indigo planters.<sup>198</sup> As most of the members were from the poor Muslim peasantry, the common funds of the sect enabled them to bring suits against the wealthy. Metcalf comments on the Faraizi that they were successful for a time in forging a deep sense of exclusiveness and high purpose among their members. The sect declined after the death of Dudhu Miyan's, but its influence in spreading Islamic teachings and in enhancing the self-consciousness of the Muslim peasantry was substantial.

These were also attempts to revive Muslims or revive the rights of Muslims. Some were non-violent yet strictly puritan like the Faraizi movements and some incorporated communal violence like the uprisings by Titu Mir. However, the case of Fakir-Sannyasi was the opposite. It is possible that the Sufi influence also played a role in keeping communal tensions at bay. One could argue that Maulana Bhashani's political journey and ideology reflect similar influences. This influence would make communal harmony, equality, and spiritualism at the center of Haq Kotha. Haq Kotha recognized the relation between colonialism and communal conflict and would refer to these movements and incidents while talking about British colonialism and importance of communal harmony.

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid, 69-70

## **Maulana's Political Philosophy: Rabubiyat and Socialism**

Maulana Bhashani had a long, eventful political life that stretched from British India to Bangladesh. Every new phase added new dimensions to his political thought. When Haq Kotha started publishing, Maulana Bhashani's political philosophy was known as Rabubiyat and Socialism, also referred to as Islamic socialism. This ideology undoubtedly formed Haq Kotha's core guiding principles. Bhashani's earlier political life and his anti-colonial struggles explains why he adopted Rabubiyat as his philosophy.

Maulana Bhashani's religious and political training has a diverse set of influences. A notable influence took place when he was a child and came in touch with Syed Nasiruddin Baghdadi, a Sufi mystic from Iraq. At the end of the nineteenth century, he became Baghdadi's disciple and started learning Islamic scripture and spirituality.<sup>199</sup> Later, as suggested by his Sufi master, he went to Darul Uloom Deoband to study further from 1907-1909. Maulana Bhashani was not technically enrolled as a student of Deoband. Instead, he took his religious training directly under the supervision of Mahmud Hasan Deobandi and Hussain Ahmed Madani.<sup>200</sup> This is where he also got his political grooming and was drawn into the anti-colonial movements. This is particularly important for understanding how Maulana Bhashani developed his view on anti-colonialism and communal solidarity. Deoband itself is an institution that had a reputation of being one of the centers of the anti-colonial movement. The Deoband movement started to 'revive India's Muslims' as their goal when the Muslim community lost much of their political power after the

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<sup>199</sup> Syed Abul Maksud, *Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani*, 2nd ed. (Agamee Prakashani, 2014), 34.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid, 35.

defeat of 1887's rebellion.<sup>201</sup> Unlike the Aligarh movement that aimed to revive Muslims in India, the Deoband movement had a robust anti-imperial stance.

Maulana Bhashani's two teachers in Deoband, Mahmud Hasan Deobandi and Hussain Ahmed Madani, were both renowned anti-colonial theology scholars and advocated against the partition of India.<sup>202</sup> Mahmud Hasan Deobandi began the silk-letter movement in 1913 to create an alliance with Ottoman Turkey, Germany, and Afghanistan to eliminate British rule in India. The movement was unsuccessful and both Mahmud Hasan Deobandi and Hussain Ahmed Madani were sent into exile.<sup>203</sup> Notably, Maulana Bhashani's firm anti-colonial and anti-imperial stance can be seen as part of Deoband's long anti-colonial tradition. Maulana Bhashani's Islamic teachings also had a spiritual dimension. Syed Nasiruddin Baghdadi was a Sufi *pir* (master) and his teachers of Deoband also had Sufi influence. This Sufi Islamic tradition upholds communal harmony and tolerance. Hussain Ahmed Madani was also known for his work and support for a united India instead of the partition.<sup>204</sup> This Sufi tradition created the space for Bhashani to go towards an anti-communal or secular approach in politics rather than a communal or Islamist line. He was later introduced to the idea of Rabubiyat through this tradition. This paved the way to join anti-colonial movements with others revolutionaries and Indian nationalists.

Another political figure who left a significant impact on Maulana Bhashani's political thinking is Bengali nationalist leader Chittaranjan Das. Maulana got in touch with Das after joining

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<sup>201</sup> Brannon D. Ingram, *Revival from below: The Deoband Movement and Global Islam* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2018).

<sup>202</sup> Jan-Peter Hartung, "The Praiseworthiness of Divine Beauty – The 'Shaykh al-Hind' Maḥmūd al-Ḥasan, Social Justice, and Deobandiyyat," *South Asian History and Culture* 7, no. 4 (October 1, 2016): 346–69, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19472498.2016.1223719>.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

the Nationalist party in 1917 and later in 1919 when he joined the Indian National Congress.<sup>205</sup> While working with C. R. Das and Subhash Chandra Bose, their approach to a united India and inclusiveness towards all religions and caste inspired young Bhashani. Later on, Bhashani would get involved in other anti-British movements and met with other anti-imperialist and revolutionary leaders.<sup>206</sup> In Amroha, United Provinces, in 1935, Bhashani pledged to establish the Hukumat-e-Rabbāniyāt (Government of the Divine) with some of the members of his revolutionary ‘ulama.’<sup>207</sup> This ‘ulama’ was known for its anti-imperialist and socialist-leaning Muslim members. The ulama included people like Maulana Maniruzzaman Islamabadi, Hasrat Mohani, and Ubaidullah Sindhi. However, it was Allama Azad Sobhani, who, in 1946, persuaded Maulana Bhashani to dedicate his life to establishing the Hukumat-e-Rabbāniyāt according to the revolutionary philosophy of Rabubiyat. According to Maulana Bhashani, it became his main objective and the primary driving force of his political struggle.<sup>208</sup>

Maulana Bhashani does not have much written work except a few autobiographical pieces and articles explaining Rabbāniyāt. The philosophy of Rabbāniyāt focused on the principle of the unity of God in all beings, and God as the “living and the conscious creator, sustainer, and evolver of the universe.”<sup>209</sup> The will of God had been made manifest in the laws of nature and humans were to live accordingly.<sup>210</sup> As Bhashani argued, Rabubiyat insists on Islam’s egalitarian message.

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<sup>205</sup> Maksud, *Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani*, 41-45.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Abid S. Bahar, “The Religious and Philosophical Basis of Bhashani’s Political Leadership” (phd, Concordia University, 2003), <https://spectrum.library.concordia.ca/2294/>.

<sup>209</sup> Syed Irfanul Bari, *Rabubiyāt: Maulana Bhashani-r Šēškathā* (Tangail, Bangladesh: Hukumat-e-Rabbaniyat Andōlan, 2002).

<sup>210</sup> Layli Uddin, “In the Land of Eternal Eid : Maulana Bhashani and the Political Mobilisation of Peasants and Lower-Class Urban Workers in East Pakistan, c.1930s-1971” (Ph.D., Royal Holloway, University of London, 2015), 63 <https://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?uin=uk.bl.ethos.700629>.

The purpose of religion should be to establish a society without exploitation where all people are equal and free from feelings of jealousy and egotism. Bhashani describes God or Allah as ‘the source of all consciousness’ to whom all humans are equal.<sup>211</sup> As the natural law on earth does not differentiate between a Hindu and a Muslim, male or female, or rich and poor, the rules of society need to reflect this feature, as well. Thus, Rabubiyat preaches the undivided equality of all people, whatever their caste, nationality, or religion.

The implementation of this philosophy is Hukumat-e-Rabbāniyāt. Drawing on this philosophy, Maulana Bhashani insisted on a class-less, exploitation-free society where the state would promote spirituality and egalitarianism.<sup>212</sup> The state must ensure the ‘haq’ or rights for all living beings, including people and animals. During his years in Assam, he became well known as a political leader and as a Sufi spiritual leader or ‘Pir’ with many followers or ‘murids.’ Rabbāniyāt as a Sufi tradition distinguish itself as it advocated revolutionary changes and do not shy away from violence, like the Gandhian tradition. The followers of Rabbāniyāt chant the slogan, Fukka Kulle Nizamin or ‘abolish every system (that exploits).’<sup>213</sup>

Maulana Bhashani was in touch with communists and they became his political allies after the partition in Pakistan. When he founded Awami Muslim League (later Bhashani renamed it Awami League), as the opposing party of Muslim League, communists joined the party under his leadership. Maulana Bhashani was intrigued by the socialist ideas and the anti-imperialist stance communists held. In 1957, Bhashani founded the National Awami Party with the leftist faction. In the ‘60s, Bhashani visited China and became a strong admirer of Mao Tse Tung’s socialist values.

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<sup>211</sup> Bari, *Rabubiyāt: Maulana Bhashani-r Šēškathā*.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

He has written a memoir about his visit to China, where he wrote about his encounter with Mao Tse-Tung, Chou En-Lai, and China's people.<sup>214</sup> However, Bhashani's relation with the communists was not always friendly. In the late '60s, when NAP split into two over determining their party line, the Maoists joined Bhashani's faction, NAP (B). In post-independent Bangladesh, his relationship with communists seemed to deteriorate when pro-Soviet communists allied with the Awami League government and blamed Maulana as anti-India and communal. For Maulana Bhashani, who was aiming to establish Hukumat-e-Rabbāniyāt, this meant opposition from two fronts. As later he inserted,

“When I talk about Hukumat-e-Rabbāniyāt, not only the communists and socialists oppose it, but also the reactionary right-wing ‘ulama’ rejects it. Communists call for abolishing private property, but they want to do it in the state's name. On the other hand, the ulama accepts that God or Allah is the creator of everything, but they are unwilling to give up private property. My followers need to realize this is how two major forces are working against establishing Hukumat-e-Rabbāniyāt.”<sup>215</sup>

Maulana Bhashani was not the only one who was speaking about Rabubiyat at that time. There were other figures in East Bengal who were inspired by this philosophy. Abul Hashim who founded Khelafat-e-Rabbani Party is another example. However, Allama Azad Sobhani and his understanding of the Rabubiyat was the direct inspiration for both Bhashani and Abul Hahsim.

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<sup>214</sup> Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani, *Mao Tse Tung Er Desh E* (Samhati, 2020).

<sup>215</sup> Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani, “Hukumat-e-Rabbāniyāt Ki O Keno,” in *Rabubiyāt: Maulana Bhashani-r Šēškathā* (Tangail, Bangladesh: Hukumat-e-Rabbaniyat Andōlan, 2002).

Sobhani wrote on Rabubiyat and the revolutionary nature of Islam. His book ‘Biplabi Nabi’ or the Revolutionary Prophet was translated into Bengali from Urdhu by Abul Hashim.<sup>216</sup>

Haq Kotha strongly advocated Hukumat-e-Rabbāniyāt. Many articles contained religious themes and were either aligned with the philosophy of Rabubiyat or interpreted theological concepts through this particular lens. However, this is not the only ideological battle the weekly was facing. Defining revolution in the context of both social and spiritual contexts was also a common theme. The weekly dealt with socialist ideas and how socialism should be developed in Bangladesh. While doing this, its writers engaged with another problem: how to resolve the problems among leftists. It saw that leftism was in decline and tried to find the reasons behind it.

### **Ideological contents in Haq Kotha**

Three themes frequently emerge among Haq Kotha’s ideological concerns. These were socialism, communal harmony, and Islamic spirituality. The articles that focused on ideological debates had their dedicated segment, but there were also news, poems, and op-eds where ideological themes or arguments were the primary focus. Interestingly, the political and theological contents are so intertwined that it is almost impossible to separate. The weekly often would put spiritual and revolutionary contents together or side by side. This tendency of merging theology and revolutionary concepts gives the impression that these ideologies were not binary opposites; rather, that they could go hand-in-hand. For example, the weekly used to publish inspirational quotes of historical figures and leaders in a segment called ‘Thoughts of the week.’

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<sup>216</sup> Allama Azad Subhani, *Biplabi Nabi* (Dhaka: Islami Academy, 1968).



The quotes would often be published in pairs with one quotation from a religious figure and another from a socialist figure. An example of ‘Thoughts of the week’ offers a better understanding. This segment contains quotes from Hazrat Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, a prominent Islamic figure and socialist leader Mao Tse Tung.<sup>217</sup> The quotes usually have a similar theme. For example, they use Hazrat Ali’s quote, “The era of the oppressed having their revenge can be far dire than an era of the dictator’s oppression” and Mao’s quote “In a class-based society, revolution and revolutionary war is obligatory. Without that, it is impossible to eradicate the ruling class and give political agency to the people.” Both quotes consist of similar themes and complement each other.

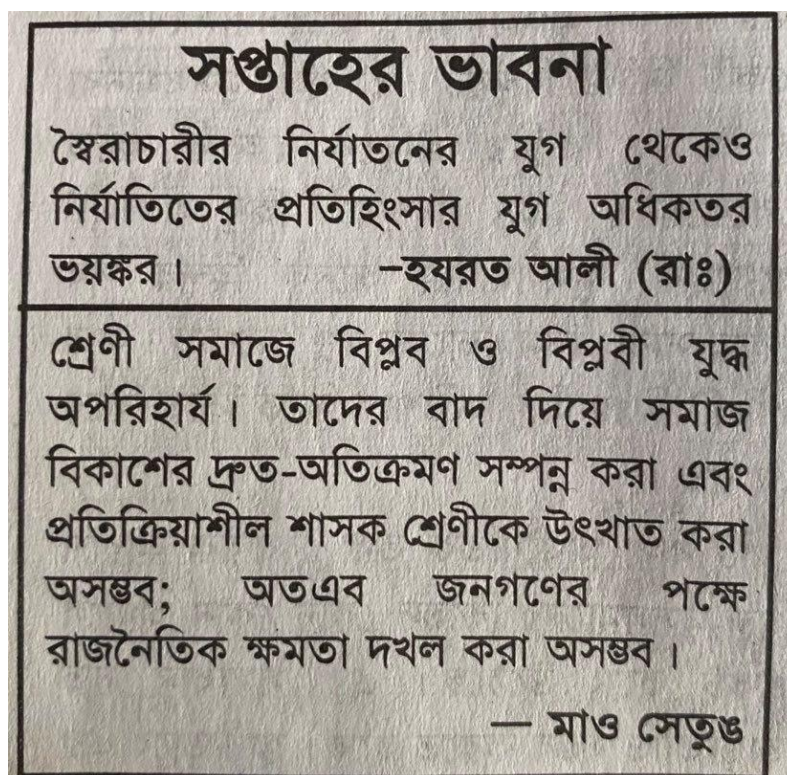


Figure 3.1 Quotes of Ali Ibn Talib and Mao Tse Tung in the section ‘thoughts of the week’ © Syed Irfanul Bari Collection, 2022. Used with permission

<sup>217</sup> Haq Kotha, “Saptaher Bhabona,” *Haq Kotha*, March 3, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

Running quotations of a similar theme created an impression that both of the ideologies these figures represented could not only exist together but could also complement each other. A similar example appears in the first issue, wherein ‘Thoughts of the week’ quoted Prophet Muhammad and Lenin together.<sup>218</sup>

Maulana Bhashani used *Haq Kotha* to create a bridge between his political and spiritual followers. *Haq Kotha* would often publish Maulana Bhashani’s quotes or instructions similar to ‘Thoughts of the week’. These instructions were both religious and political. Even instructions for his religious followers contained political elements that could not be ignored. In the second issue of *Haq Kotha*, there was a specific set of instructions for the *murids* (religious or spiritual followers), which contained nine points.<sup>219</sup> The nine points contained primarily religious and social instructions, but many were politically charged. The first point, “You must fulfill your duties towards Allah as well as your duties towards humankind (no matter the religion and race),” emphasizes not only the importance of prayer but it also contains anti-communal sentiment. The second point contains political instruction, “You must work and join movements to establish socialism. [This is] the only way to bring peace and prosperity.” This is how Maulana Bhashani made socialism and communal harmony part of religious duty for his followers, or *murids*. For these reasons, it is often challenging to separate *Haq Kotha*’s content into separate political and religious spheres of influence.

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<sup>218</sup> *Haq Kotha*, “Saptaher Bhabona -1,” *Haq Kotha*, February 25, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>219</sup> The whole instruction is available in the appendices. *Haq Kotha*, “Murid Der Prati Amar Niradesh,” *Haq Kotha*, March 3, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

## Haq Kotha's Position on Communalism

Communal harmony is a frequent theme in Haq Kotha. This topic was highlighted not only from a theological perspective but also from a social and political context. As mentioned earlier, communalism presented a complex problem in the Indian subcontinent for a long time. It was a significant concern in the political sphere especially because it has led to much violence and turmoil. The Bengal province was also divided as a result of communal interests, and this led to devastating riots like the Calcutta killings and Noakhali riots in 1946.<sup>220</sup> After the partition in Pakistan, the political sphere retained much of this communal sentiment, which the Muslim League dominated. During the Pakistan period, Maulana Bhashani was among others who dedicatedly worked to resolve the communal tension between Hindus and Muslims.<sup>221</sup> During the war, the Pakistani army specifically targeted Hindu minorities to exterminate, torture, and rape. So, tackling communalism was not a new concern in this constituency. However, Haq Kotha's advocacy for communal harmony has some unique features. Haq Kotha's secularism does not mean the absence of religion in the political sphere. As shown in the instructions for murids, Bhashani urged his spiritual followers to ensure all people's rights no matter their race and religion.

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<sup>220</sup> Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932–1947*, Cambridge South Asian Studies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511563256>.

<sup>221</sup> Peter Custers, "Maulana Bhashani and the Transition to Secular Politics in East Bengal," *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 47, no. 2 (April 1, 2010): 231–59, <https://doi.org/10.1177/001946461004700204>.



## সাম্প্রদায়িকতার অভিশাপ থেকে মুক্তি পেয়েছি কি?

বাংলাদেশে অনেক কালের অভিশাপ  
সাম্প্রদায়িকতার স্বরূপ আমাদেরকে আর  
কখনো দেখতে হবে কি? যাদের অন্তঃকরণে

Figure 3.2 Article titled 'Did we get rid of the curse of communalism?' © Syed Irfanul Bari Collection, 2022. Used with permission

So, how did Haq Kotha understand communalism in the context of Bengal? In the second issue of the weekly it published an article entitled 'Did we get rid of the curse of communalism?'<sup>222</sup> The article was more of a warning of the danger of communal violence possibly still lurking. It also described the history of Hindu-Muslim communal conflict since the British period. This shows the weekly's sensitivity to communal issues and the importance of trying to transcend further conflict and bloodshed. It describes how the British engineered this conflict in Bengal by creating a polarization of power with the Hindu community appointed into different positions of authority, whereas the Muslim community was viewed as having little agency as subjects. This imbalance of power created an artificial divide between these two communities and soon turned

<sup>222</sup> Haq Kotha, "Samprodayikotar Avishap Theke Mukti Peyechi Ki?," *Haq Kotha*, March 3, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

into communal violence. It added details of how the Pakistani military tried to commit ethnic cleansing against Bengali Hindus, including the accusation that some Bengali Muslims helped them in order to gain Hindu properties. The article then draws its readers' attention to the present situation with some examples of Hindu properties being seized and warns that communalism was still a problem for Bangladesh. It added that some people will always try to exploit this communal tension to use for their benefit irrespective of their religion. The article reasoned that the root of this conflict is not religious but socio-economical, exacerbated by the ruling class (the British together with the Pakistani regime), and boldly claimed the solution is to abolish private property.

Another article of importance was published in the fourth issue entitled, "Communalism only Benefits the Ruling Class and Brings Misery to the Poor."<sup>223</sup> The article reads,

"Communalism is now ingrained in our mentality. During the British period when the Hindu landlords and money lenders exploited Muslim peasants, they thought it is because they are Hindu. During Pakistan, they saw the same kind of exploitation was being done only by the new Muslim landlords and money lenders. In reality, every landlord and money lender are the same whether they are Hindu-Muslim, Pakistani, or Bengalis. Today, farmers and workers need to realize that communalism is a tool to divert our attention from the actual culprit, the ruling class".

The article highlighted some incidents in the country and warned that communal conflict was again brewing. It again showed how communal violence was used in the past to exploit the poor. This time it discussed more regarding the complexity of communalism in the region. In summary, the

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<sup>223</sup> Haq Kotha, "Samprodayikota Shoshonkarir Sohayota Kore Matro," *Haq Kotha*, March 17, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

articles regarding communalism in Haq Kotha always tried to bring attention to the root of the conflict showing how communal violence was exacerbated by political and economic factors. This was also notable in the news regarding communal violence, too.<sup>224</sup> There were also statements about innocent people being persecuted solely based on religious identity and profession like the clerical class. The weekly addressed this problem while talking about punishment for war criminals and collaborators, who were largely from Islamist groups like the Muslim League and Jamat-e-Islam. It asserted that in history, although many priests and clergy members assisted tyrants, that did not mean everyone who belongs to that community can be perceived as guilty and persecuted accordingly. It provided examples of Muslim religious figures who were vital in the anti-imperial struggle. It emphasized making sure to catch and punish those who were guilty not because of their religious or political affiliation.<sup>225</sup>

### **Socialism in Haq Kotha**

Socialism was another heated topic for Haq Kotha. It was a complicated situation because the government was not anti-socialist. In fact, the government, too, claimed that they were making a socialist state. As mentioned earlier, socialism was supposed to be one of the four principles of the state of Bangladesh. So, the dispute was not about whether the country should be socialist or not, rather the focus was on what kind of socialism Bangladesh should strive for. In many articles and news, Haq Kotha engaged with this topic. Since the beginning of Haq Kotha's publication, it showed skepticism towards the government's version of socialism. As discussed in an earlier chapter, the weekly questioned how the government would implement socialism without a

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<sup>224</sup> Haq Kotha, "Samprodayikota Srishti Korche Kara?," *Haq Kotha*, July 7, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>225</sup> Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani, "Nirdosh Bekti Der Saja Jeno Na Hoy," *Haq Kotha*, July 7, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

revolution by the people.<sup>226</sup> Haq Kotha saw socialism as a system to broaden the agency of the people. It is evident that Haq Kotha saw both the government's model of socialism and the Soviet model of socialism as flawed. It drew more influence from the Maoist model, but did not completely endorse China's regime. The weekly saw the war as having possibly turned into a revolution, but that this did not happen because control was quickly taken by the Awami League, which lacked class consciousness. Therefore, Haq Kotha described the war as an event where "bloods were spilled, but no revolution happened."<sup>227</sup>

In its second issue, Haq Kotha published a chapter with the title "Which way the socialism of Bangladesh is heading?"<sup>228</sup> The article admitted that it was only a few months since the independence of Bangladesh, but then it raised some critical points. It raised key questions about how the government was planning to implement socialism. It pointed out the class position of the people in power and claimed that they would establish socialism. The article argued that they would implement a socialist model that was supposed to be beneficial for the working class of Bengal, although it might be unlikely due to the fact that the people in power were from the privileged class. It also asked how socialism will change the character of the ruling class, who historically had been exploitative of the poor. Especially since the ruling body did not belong to the working class, Haq Kotha questioned how it would have the class consciousness to represent the people. This shows Haq Kotha was concerned about the government's class nature and saw this as a major obstacle towards socialism. Furthermore, it also helps to explain their skepticism from the beginning. The weekly even questioned if the Soviet KGB assisted in implementing the

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<sup>226</sup> Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani, "Ganabiplob Chara Samajtantra Kayem Er Najir Nei, Tabe," *Haq Kotha*, February 25, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>227</sup> Haq Kotha, "Raktapat Ghateche Kintu Biplob Hoyni."

<sup>228</sup> Haq Kotha, "Bangladesh Er Samajtantra Kon Path E?," *Haq Kotha*, March 3, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

government's version of socialism. The affiliation with the Soviets was also a concern. In the fourth and fifth issue of the weekly, it also published feedback on the original article from its readers. The op-eds, too, weigh in about the vagueness of the socialist model the government was trying to impose. One op-ed sent from Dhaka argued that the government was failing to show any clear model that it would enforce socialist rule. What they labeled as 'the transition period,' the piece continued, was not showing logical progress.<sup>229</sup> Another op-ed from Tangail presented a similar argument.<sup>230</sup> It also added that the ruling party claimed they were implementing the Bangladeshi version of socialism and Mujibbad (socialism according to the values of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman), but that in reality they were just trying to exploit people by the name of these new models. They were using Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's name only to dishonor him.

Haq Kotha not only saw socialism being misled, but also identified a crisis of leftism in the country. State-sponsored violence was often targeted towards leftists who did not condone the governments' political line. The reports of the killing of leftists all over the country became more common over time.<sup>231</sup> In issue 13, Haq Kotha claimed Bangladeshi leftism was in grave crisis. The issue's headline story described the ongoing extrajudicial killings of leftists.<sup>232</sup> The news claimed that those being targeted were anti-imperialists, Maoists, and anti-Soviet reformists. The Haq Kotha cited some incidents of leftist persecution as examples. It also described the systemic way leftists were being killed, which started at the beginning of the war. It described how the secret intelligence force was working to capture whoever could be related with leftism or known as a

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<sup>229</sup> Irfan, "Op-Ed: Bangladesh Er Samajtantra Kon Path E?," *Haq Kotha*, March 17, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>230</sup> Swapan Bhoomik, "Op-Ed: Bangladesh Er Samajtantra Kon Path E? -2," *Haq Kotha*, March 24, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>231</sup> Haq Kotha, "Rajshahi Er Grame Bhrarotiyo Soinno."

<sup>232</sup> Haq Kotha, "Lokkhadhik Bamponthi Hotya Kora Hobe," *Haq Kotha*, May 26, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.



communist sympathizer. The report emphasized how the persecution started during the war to secure control of leading the war. This is also one of the reasons why the war did not become a revolution despite having mass armed participation. Notably, the weekly did not address the pro-Soviet as either leftist or socialists. The report compared these actions as similar to the actions of the Islamist extremist, Jamat-e-Islam. Instead of Jamat-e-Islam, it argued, this role was now being played by the state; with the assistance of India's intelligence and the pro-Moscow fractions.

The pro-Soviet socialist's position was brutally criticized in Haq Kotha. As discussed in an earlier chapter, Haq Kotha was consistently aware of the Soviet and Indian influence in the state-building process. According to Haq Kotha, pro-Soviet socialists' direct support to the government and silence during the persecution of NAP (B) partisans and other socialists made them collaborators of the ongoing corruption and oppression. Haq Kotha covered news and discussed in length about the failure of pro-Soviet socialist and their socialist model. In the same issue that the weekly published news on the persecution of indigenous people in the Chittagong hill tracts by the state, it published an article about pro-Soviet socialists' current position in politics.<sup>233</sup> The weekly criticized their position as being undemocratic, unpopular, and even reactionary. However, their approach did not focus on socialism but on their compromising stance with the ruling class. The article argued they were assisting tyranny to secure their position in power. In the next issue, the weekly focused on different incidents that indicated their political and class position. It also argued the country was in crisis because of rampant corruption and oppression by the ruling class and that the pro-Moscow socialists' role has been nothing but support for the status quo.

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<sup>233</sup> Haq Kotha, "Moscow Panthi Der Rajniti," *Haq Kotha*, June 30, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

## মস্কোপন্থী ন্যাপ

বাংলাদেশে জামাতের প্রেতাత్মা

ইসলামের নামে জামাতে ইসলাম এবং  
সমাজতন্ত্রের নামে মস্কোপন্থী ন্যাপের  
কার্যকলাপের বিশেষ মিল লক্ষ্য করা যায়।  
অবশ্য কিছু যে গড়মিল নেই তা নয়। জামাত  
আর মস্কো ন্যাপের লক্ষ্য আর উদ্দেশ্য যে এক  
তা তাদের কার্যকলাপ দেখলে কারো বুঝতে

Figure 3.3: News on NAP (M) addressing as reactionaries like the Islamists © Syed Irfanul Bari Collection, 2022.  
Used with permission

Similarly, it was clear that the pro-Moscow faction blamed Bhashani and his faction of NAP (B) for being an enemy of the state, communal, and an agent of Peking. In these articles, Haq Kotha focused on the pro-Soviets' role in supporting the government and its actions. Haq Kotha's position on Soviet socialism as reactionary can be seen further in articles like "NAP (Moscow): Specter of Jamat-e-Islam."<sup>234</sup> It compared pro-Soviets to the reactionary Islamist party Jamat-e-Islam that killed or assisted in persecuting members of progressive and anti-imperialist parties. The article claimed, "There are astonishing similarities the way Jamat-e-Islam uses Islam and NAP (M) uses socialism to meet their goal. Even though they might seem polar opposite, in reality their goals and nature are the same." The article also claimed the NAP (M) were assisting the exploitation of the Soviet-India connection in Bangladesh in the name of socialism just like Jamat-

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<sup>234</sup> Haq Kotha, "Moscow Panthi NAP: Bangladesh E Jamat Er Pretatma," *Haq Kotha*, September 1, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

E-Islam justified West Pakistan's oppression in the name of Islam and unity of Pakistan. It claimed they were functioning similarly, only in the service of a different oppressor.

### **Spirituality in Haq Kotha**

Haq Kotha's 'Murider Darbar,' or 'court of the disciples,' segment was specifically about theological arguments and articles that deals with spirituality, Islam, and revolution. This section primarily dealt with describing Hukumat-e-Rabbāniyāt and its political interpretation. This also became the space to discuss Islamic socialism and spiritual interpretation of concepts like communal harmony, private property, and revolution. In other words, the revolution in the light of spiritual Islam and spiritualism in the light of revolutionary politics.

Haq Kotha's interpretation regarding 'the procession of the Day of the Ashura' is a good example of religious concept interpreting in a revolutionary context.<sup>235</sup> The day of the Ashura is a holy day observed by Muslims. It is observed on the tenth day of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar, when Husayn b. Ali, the third Shi'i imam and the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, was martyred at Karbala, Iraq.<sup>236</sup> The article discussed the controversy regarding the procession that many from the Muslim community celebrated, but some Muslims also considered it *bid'ah*, or innovation in religious matter. Although the article argued that it was *bid'ah*, it also emphasized that this procession has become a part of Muslim community and an important symbol of resistance against tyranny. It also pointed out that tyrants like Yazid still existed. For these reasons, the procession was a way to celebrate the holy day and unite Muslims against tyranny and

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<sup>235</sup> Lutful Aziz, "Ebarer Maharram," *Haq Kotha*, February 25, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>236</sup> "Ashura," in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Islamic Political Thought* (Princeton University Press, 2012), 45, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400838554>.

oppression. A similar example is the biographical article on the Sufi saint Lal Shahbaz Qalandar and how he fought against the tyrant king.<sup>237</sup>

The section ‘Murider Darbar’ had articles mostly on theology and spirituality. However, the spiritual content often had political dimensions, as well. For example, the two-part series article “the will of Allah” mostly discussed God’s will and action and the spiritual significance of being selfless.<sup>238</sup> However, it also discussed how in the eyes of Allah every creation is equal no matter the race and religion. The diversity of religion is something to appreciate, and all religions played vital roles in advancing civilization and serving humanity. According to Bhashani, diversity of people was vital to a revolutionary and spiritual understanding of the world.<sup>239240</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> Md. Obaidur Rahman, “Lal Shahbaz Qalandar,” *Haq Kotha*, March 24, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>238</sup> Muhammad Hussain, “Allah Er Eccha E Chorom Eccha,” *Haq Kotha*, February 25, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>239</sup> Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani, “Touhidi Biplob,” *Haq Kotha*, April 23, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>240</sup> Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani, “Touhidi Biplob,” *Haq Kotha*, April 23, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

# মুর্দিদারদার

## ব্যক্তিগত মালিকানা

মুসলিম অধুষিত দেশে সমাজতন্ত্র কায়েমের  
বিরুদ্ধে প্রতিক্রিয়াশীল চক্র ও সাম্রাজ্যবাদের  
দালালরা কখনো গোপনে কখনো প্রকাশ্যে  
প্রচার করে বেড়ান-ইসলামে ব্যক্তিগত

Figure 3.4: ‘Murider Darbar’ segment’s feature on private property. © Syed Irfanul Bari Collection, 2022. Used with permission

The ‘Murider Darbar’ segment also covered concepts specifically on socialism and revolution. These articles can be regarded as Islamic interpretations in support of socialist ideas. For example, it takes on private property in interesting ways. Haq Kotha published a series article on ‘Murider Darbar’ in its fifteenth issue and sixteenth issue.<sup>241</sup> The article started with, “In Muslim majority countries the reactionaries and imperialists often say that in Islam it is permissible to have private properties. They use this misleading statement to claim that there is no room for socialism in the Muslim world.”<sup>242</sup> The article discussed the concept of private property in the light of Rabubiyat. In the first part, it argued that Muslims should not believe in the concept of private

<sup>241</sup> Haq Kotha, “Byaktigoto Malikana,” *Haq Kotha*, June 9, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection; Haq Kotha, “Byaktigoto Malikana-2,” *Haq Kotha*, June 16, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

property. It used Quranic texts to argue that Allah was the owner of all creation. Therefore, as people are part of the creation, they cannot own anything. It also argued that Islam did not recognize the concept of private property. It recognized humans were the best among the creation, but that it was their duty to protect and ensure the distribution of property justly. In other words, the role of humans should be that of custodian. The article also gave examples of property redistribution done by the second Khalif, Umar. The article argued that private property should be abolished because it does not align with Islamic values and creates conflicts. Further, it went on to argue that the state must control and redistribute the property, recognizing that the property owner is not the state but God. It asserted that the state must follow God's way to govern the country, equal and fair to all creation without discrimination based on race, religion and class. Here, it is important to realize how radical this idea was in the context of Islamic narrative.

Another topic that received much attention in *Haq Kotha* is that of non-violence and revolution.<sup>243</sup> The paper was very critical about non-violence as a method of political tactic. As the author of the article Maulana Bhashani was especially concerned about this topic. The articles discussed how non-violence consists of certain limitations and cannot be the only method to achieve revolution. Violent revolution often becomes the only way of rebellion for oppressed classes. Non-violence was also discussed in the 'Murider Darbar' section. It emphasized how Prophet Muhammad also had to go to war and chose armed struggle to fight injustice.<sup>244</sup>

Even though *Haq Kotha* usually used the term socialism in most of their segments, Islamic socialism was also discussed in the theology segment. The main focus on discussing Islamic

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<sup>243</sup> Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani, "Ahimsa O Biplob," *Haq Kotha*, March 17, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>244</sup> Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani, "Amar Priyo Nabi Onnayer Biruddhe Astro Dharan Korteo Diddha Kore Ni," June 30, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

socialism was on the values of Rabubiyat and how Islam as a philosophy was more compatible with socialism than capitalism.<sup>245</sup> It also addressed Islam not as a religion but as an ideology, concerned with eliminating exploitation. The Islamic socialism that the weekly espoused had differences with other forms of Islamic socialism that existed in other parts of the world. In describing its ideological character, Rabubiyat is often referred to as “Maulana Bhashani’s Islamic Socialism.” There is nothing written that explains the difference between Islamic Socialism and Bhashani’s Socialism or any other socialist model in general. However, it is clear that Bhashani wanted a socialist model similar to the Maoist model, built on his socialist model of Rabubiyat.

The ideological contents of Haq Kotha spoke to a wide range of themes. Communal harmony and socialism were at the core of the weekly, but due to the Sufi philosophy of Rabubiyat it contributed to a unique socialist project. Haq Kotha’s theological section had focused a great deal on revolutionary struggle and communal harmony alongside spiritualism. While leftism for some is often regarded as anti-religious, Haq Kotha’s approach clearly tried to reduce the tension between leftism and religion. One of Haq Kotha’s prime focuses was to show that Islam and socialism were compatible both in terms of values and political principles. Haq Kotha also saw leftism in Bangladesh as in crisis. It argued one of the reasons behind this decline is how the government and its allies were serving the privileged class in the name of establishing a new form of socialism. It saw the persecution of anti-government leftists as evidence of the government not being peoples’ representative but that of the privileged class, oppressing like before.

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<sup>245</sup> Muhammad Hussain, “Darshonik Er Drishtite Islami Samajtantra,” July 21, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection; Muhammad Hussain, “Darshonik Er Drishtite Islami Samajtantra-2,” July 28, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection; Muhammad Hussain, “Darshonik Er Drishtite Islami Samajtantra-3,” July 28, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Haq Kotha and Agency of the People**

This thesis has thus far focused on the contents that were published in Haq Kotha and how the weekly interpreted or explained certain pertinent social issues. However, the analysis of this content does not adequately show the newspaper's relationship with the public and explain the role it played in broadening the agency of Bangladeshi working- and lower-class people. By the time Haq Kotha started publishing, Maulana Bhashani was a known national leader who had shown his ability as a political leader in mobilizing the masses. Nevertheless, did Haq Kotha as a political project help to restore the agency of the people? Or, was it only Maulana Bhashani's propaganda machine? This chapter will look into the people's role in Haq Kotha. In order to do that, this chapter examines how Haq Kotha worked as a newspaper to collect and disseminate news and how peoples' opinions or demands shaped its agenda. This chapter shows that people's contributions in Haq Kotha were not limited only to the op-ed or letter section. Its influence was visible and vital in other segments as well. People actively engaged and contributed to the news making process. As Haq Kotha relied more on peoples' active participation than journalists employed by the weekly, this chapter argues that peoples' role was more than simply as a source of news. This attempt can be interpreted as part of a movement from below since it tried to increase the subaltern agency by directly engaging with the government.



## **Who are ‘the people’?**

Letters found from the Syed Irfanul Bari collection provide exclusive insight about the readers and contributors of Haq Kotha. These letters reveal who were the people that were providing information to Haq Kotha and the role they played as a news source for the paper. The letters not only provide information, but also the opinions of these people. It means they relied on this paper as a platform to share their opinion and even to seek help.

It is hard to classify the writers of these letters based on only one category. The topic of these letters covered a wide range of issues. Different authors wrote about different issues from perspectives like class, political affiliation, race, and gender. For example, a significant number of these people showed no affiliation with any political party. There were people from both urban and rural areas. Even though not all letters specified the writers’ socio-economic status, based on the materials collected, the majority were from the working class with poor financial backgrounds or from those who recently experienced a sudden loss of wealth. In other words, they were lay people, often powerless and helpless. There were also letters from politicians, members of different political parties, and labor organizations. However, one thing is common among these writers and contributors, they all felt they lacked political agency in public space and the states governing institutions (judicial system, mainstream media) to address and solve their problems. So, to describe who were involved with Haq Kotha, the concentration of this chapter will be on their identity or affiliation, based on the description of the issues each were facing.

## **Mukti Bahini or the Freedom fighters**

We have seen how the liberation war was an important subject in Haq Kotha. For these reasons, there were a significant number of letters written on this subject. The Muktibahini, or the

armed freedom fighters, were one of them. Freedom fighters were the guerrilla resistance force that emerged when the Pakistani military cracked down on East Pakistan on 25 March, 1971. Despite the sudden and fierce attack by the army, there was popular resistance all over the Bengal Delta.<sup>246</sup> All over East Pakistan, men and women joined the resistance which later became known as the Mukti Bahini. People also helped these guerrilla forces by sheltering, aiding, and guiding them.<sup>247</sup>

Mukti Bahini consisted of the military, paramilitary, and civilians. A formal military leadership of the resistance was created in April 1971 under the Provisional Government of Bangladesh. They were trained and organized in India. However, not all groups of Mukti Bahini were operating under the command of the Provisional Government of Bangladesh. There were other local groups that were fighting against the Pakistani army. Among the many groups were the Kader Bahini in Tangail, the Afsar Bahini in Mymensingh, the Ohidur Bahini in the Northwest, and the Siraj Sikdar group in Barisal.<sup>248</sup> Many of these freedom fighter groups often collaborated with each other and the Indian army. By November 1971, there were around 1,00,000 members of Mukti Bahini and half of them were inside East Pakistan at that time, where they established control of more than 10 liberated areas.

As mentioned before, people from various walks of lives joined the Mukti Bahini. There were both partisan and nonpartisan members. Some also endorsed different political parties and ideologies instead of the ruling party, Awami League. For example, Siraj Sikdar group was a radical Maoist group, and as mentioned in chapter two, they were rivals of Awami League and

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<sup>246</sup> Willem van Schendel, "Armed Conflict," in *A History of Bangladesh*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 187, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108684644>.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid, 189

<sup>248</sup> Ibid, 191

saw India as an enemy.<sup>249</sup> There were also freedom fighters who did not come from a socially or financially privileged background. In Haq Kotha, a common theme regarding Mukti Bahini was the abuse and mistreatment of freedom fighters when they came back after the war. These freedom fighters were facing different kinds of abuse, extortion, and forced eviction. Some of these freedom fighters had different political affiliations like Major Abdul Jalil. Freedom fighters who were not politically active also faced persecution.

### **Biharis and Enemy Collaborators**

The Biharis are another community who had significant responses among the letters and in coverage by the paper. Biharis are people who migrated from India to East Pakistan during the partition of India in 1947. Because of the Hindu-Muslim communal violence of 1946-47 in riot-prone areas like Calcutta, East Bengal, and Bihar, these people sought refuge in East Pakistan but were largely Urdu speaking.<sup>250</sup> When the Biharis came to East Pakistan they found themselves in a very different regional culture. There was contrast in terms of language, customs, traditions, and culture, but they did share the same religious affiliation.<sup>251</sup>

In other words, the Biharis felt they were a minority among the Bengali-speaking majority, though Urdu was the official language of Pakistan. As such, they related more with Urdu speaking West Pakistanis.<sup>252</sup> This impacted politics, as well. The Biharis did not have their separate political party, but very few supported Bengali nationalists or joined Awami League. The majority of them

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<sup>249</sup> Md. Nurul Amin, "Maoism in Bangladesh: The Case of the East Bengal Sarbohara Party," *Asian Survey* 26, no. 7 (1986): 759–73, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2644210>.

<sup>250</sup> Zaglul Haider, "Repatriation of the Biharis Stranded in Bangladesh: Diplomacy and Development," *Asian Profile* Vol.31 (June 12, 2003), 527.

<sup>251</sup> Kazi Fahmida Farzana, "An Artificial Minority: The Stateless Biharis in Bangladesh," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 29, no. 2 (June 1, 2009): 224, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602000902943682>.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid.

supported the Muslim League and were in favour of the unification of Pakistan.<sup>253</sup> This polarization between Bengali and Bihari was visible early on when Pakistan was formed. Biharis favored Urdu as the official state language of Pakistan when Bengalis demanded to make Bengali as the official state language in 1948. The first Bengali-Bihari riot took place in 1952 in Adamji Jute mill as a result of the language movement and the killing of students in Dhaka.<sup>254</sup> Through the 1950's and 60's there were several riots, and Bengalis considered them anti-Bengali or 'permanent agents of West Pakistan.'<sup>255</sup>

When the tension between East and West Pakistan peaked in 1971, the Muslim League managed to convince the Biharis that they could only survive by supporting the pro-Pakistan and pro-Islamic forces of West Pakistan. Therefore, many Biharis joined Pakistani militias and supported or collaborated when the war of 1971 broke out in East Pakistan.<sup>256</sup> After the war, the Biharis were collectively branded as Pakistani collaborators. There was severe retribution following the war by Bengalis, which led to a counter-genocide killing thousands of Biharis and forcing millions to seek refuge in slum settlements and refugee camps.<sup>257</sup> This is when Haq Kotha started operating as a newspaper. This was certainly a complicated situation. On the one hand, news of many Biharis actively supported and assisted the Pakistani military in committing the

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<sup>253</sup> Zaglul Haider, "Repatriation of the Biharis Stranded in Bangladesh: Diplomacy and Development," *Asian Profile* Vol.31 (June 12, 2003), 529.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid.

<sup>256</sup> Kazi Fahmida Farzana, "An Artificial Minority: The Stateless Biharis in Bangladesh," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 29, no. 2 (June 1, 2009): 225, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602000902943682>.

<sup>257</sup> Willem van Schendel, "A State Is Born," in *A History of Bangladesh*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 198, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108684644>.

atrocities that were unfolding, and on the other hand, there were reports about Biharis being persecuted by vengeful Bengalis.

The Biharis became the most vulnerable community in post-war Bangladesh, as they were facing persecution collectively whether they were involved in war crimes or not. There were also letters about Bengali enemy collaborators or people who were accused of being collaborators. During the war, the Pakistani army created civilian groups called 'Peace Committees' and paramilitary groups known as Razakar, Al-Shams, and Al Badr, under Pakistani command.<sup>258</sup> Bengalis and Biharis loyal to Pakistan joined these paramilitary forces. Many letters and news reports were about these war collaborators. Several reports were about war criminals getting away or identifying those who were still holding important positions of power because of their connections and influences over the ruling party. These collaborators, who were often referred to as 'dalal,' managed to either cut deals with the new authority or belonged to the powerful class which were still influential after the war. After the war, many of the collaborators also faced a similar vengeful fate by the Bengalis.

What makes the situation more complicated is many were also accused of being collaborators and faced persecution without any proper evidence or trial. In this situation Haq Kotha received basically two kinds of letters regarding Bengali war collaborators. Some were about war criminals who were getting away with their crime and some were also about the accused who claimed their innocence and claimed they were the victim of political or other rivalry.

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<sup>258</sup> Ibid, 191.

## Peoples' Involvement in Haq Kotha

The most popular segment of Haq Kotha probably was the 'Eha ki shotto?' ('Is it true?') section. In this section, Haq Kotha published different news, complaints, and information sent by people nationwide. This was a regular segment which started in the first issue. In this segment, people would send information about corruption, injustice, or abuse of power happening in their region. 'Eha ki shotto' became a space for the people to participate as a correspondent journalist for Haq Kotha. A total of one hundred and forty-two reports were published in this segment until the weekly got banned. The popularity of this segment and how it functioned is visible in the announcements Haq Kotha posted. By the second issue, Haq Kotha reported the overwhelming response the paper received for this segment.<sup>259</sup> Haq Kotha requested its readers to send letters with names and addresses without fear since anonymous letters are hard to verify with authenticity. In the fourth issue, the weekly again posted an announcement that the paper was getting many reports, and it reassured its readers that every report would be published once they have been verified.

The reports of 'Eha ki shotto' had a wide range of topics, but the segment was mostly about the abuse of power by the government or members of the ruling party. It became a space where people from all classes, predominantly the unprivileged working-class, countered the establishment by contributing and disseminating news. For example, the 'Eha ki Shotto' column of the second issue had four reports.<sup>260</sup> These reports include reports of corruption in the health ministry, money extortion by a government official, a price hike in kerosene in Tangail due to

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<sup>259</sup> Haq Kotha, "Eha Ki Shotto Notice," *Haq Kotha*, March 3, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>260</sup> Haq Kotha, "Eha Ki Shotto No. 5-8," *Haq Kotha*, March 3, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

hoarding by a government employer (MCA), and looting of the chemical factory, Kohinoor by people of the ruling party. In the fifth issue, the section included three news articles.<sup>261</sup> It had news of nepotism by top officials and industrialists in the tea cultivation industry, a Hindu temple occupied by a government-backed politician claiming to be a freedom fighter, and corruption by a government officer.

In the 15th issue, the ‘Eha ki shotto?’ segment contained eight reports.<sup>262</sup> It included a report on two seized Indian trucks by the custom officers on the Indian-Bangladesh border containing medical equipment. The drivers of the trucks tried to bypass the customs by claiming they belonged to a relative of the prime minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. It also reported on the newly appointed administrator of thirteen mills in Adamjee, who would supervise fifty-thousand workers. This person, the article identified, used to be the president of the Peace Committee (Pakistani collaborator organization) in Dhaka, and was reputed to have been a terror to the freedom fighters. It also reported that the government has assigned 330 positions to the members of Chatro League (student wing of Awami League), instead of to those who were eligible, who had actually passed the special exam in 1970 for these positions. The segment also reported recruitment of known Pakistani collaborators into government positions, including even in the judiciary system.

Haq Kotha covered all kinds of violence, including gender violence, nepotism, and corruption, focusing on the government’s role. The 18th issue’s ‘Eha ki Shotto?’ segment reported on the abduction of a woman by an MCA officer’s relative, for which no government official was

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<sup>261</sup> Haq Kotha, “Eha Ki Shotto No. 21,” *Haq Kotha*, March 24, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>262</sup> Haq Kotha, “Eha Ki Shotto No. 75-82,” *Haq Kotha*, June 9, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

willing to assist in helping to rescue the woman.<sup>263</sup> It also reported news such as that of a chairman of a relief committee in Barisal that got caught stealing milk powder and that later was spared prosecution by other corrupt government officials. Another report describes a government officer suspiciously getting rich and a lawyer who vocally opposed the freedom fighters that was working as a government lawyer. At the end of this segment the weekly added “This is the 100th report of this segment that strikes the bearers of injustice and corruption. This is why the oppressive class had this newspaper’s editor arrested. However, Haq Kotha will continue publishing this segment.”

## ইহা কি শত?

॥ ২৩ ॥

কেবল ‘প্রি নট প্রি’ হলেই নয়, খোদ  
আগরতলা ষড়যন্ত্র মামলার অন্যতম স্থপতি  
হলেও বাংলাদেশ সরকার চাকুরী দিতে বেশ  
উৎসাহ বোধ করে থাকেন।

তমঘা পেয়ে অবসরপ্রাপ্ত ৬৪ বছর বয়স্ক  
এমনি এক ভদ্রলোককে বাংলাদেশ সরকার  
আইন ও পরিষদের উর্ধ্বতন পদে বহাল করে  
তা জোরেসোরে প্রমাণ করেছেন। অথচ এই  
ভদ্রলোকই কিনা ১৯৬৮-৬৯ সালে শেখ  
মুজিবকে ফাঁসিয়ে ফেলার কসরত  
করেছিলেন। সুদীর্ঘ তিন বৎসর অবসর  
গ্রহণের পর কাকে ফাঁসানোর ওয়াদাবদ্ধ হয়ে  
তিনি এই চাকুরীটি পেলেন, আমাদের তা  
জানা নেই।

Figure 4.1: News of corruption in ‘Eha ki shotto?’ segment. © Syed Irfanul Bari Collection, 2022. Used with permission

<sup>263</sup> Haq Kotha, “Eha Ki Shotto 96-101,” *Haq Kotha*, June 30, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.



Topics of ‘Eha ki shotto’ also contained news regarding Indian influence and domination inside the country. In the 12th issue, the segment reported an Indian truck that was caught smuggling in the border of Benapole but later released by the order of a minister.<sup>264</sup> It had reports of a Bengali hockey player going to India who used to publicly oppose the freedom of Bangladesh. In the 27<sup>th</sup> issue, the section posted news regarding India.<sup>265</sup> The news was on the vulnerable India-Bangladesh border of Meghalay, where Indian people entering Bangladesh were looting along the Mymensingh section of the border of Durgapur.

This is not the only segment that centered on the people’s participation. Haq Kotha also had a letter and opinion segment where people could post their opinions and problems. In the ‘Eha ki Shotto’ segment, the name and address of the sender were kept anonymous but, in these segments, that was usually not the case. People shared their opinions and concerns in a more personal format. The section had a much more subjective feel, like an op-ed, in contrast to ‘Eha ki shotto’s objective ‘hard news’ approach. The segment ‘Apnar Chithi,’ or ‘Your Letters,’ covered a wide range of topics like appreciating Haq Kotha’s role as a watchdog<sup>266</sup> or pleading for the cancellation of professional board exam fees.<sup>267</sup>

The letters usually included topics on the abuse of power. For example, one letter requested help in solving problems like land seizure by the ruling party.<sup>268</sup> Other writers, such as low-ranked

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<sup>264</sup> Haq Kotha, “Eha Ki Shotto No. 58-63,” *Haq Kotha*, 19 May 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>265</sup> Haq Kotha, “Eha Ki Shotto No. 131-134,” *Haq Kotha*, September 1, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>266</sup> Ahammod Sobhan, “Apnar Chithi,” *Haq Kotha*, March 10, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>267</sup> Tajul Islam, “Parikhsha Er Fee Prasngge,” *Haq Kotha*, March 17, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>268</sup> “Amader Jami Firiye Din,” *Haq Kotha*, April 23, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

post officers, complained about not getting proper wages.<sup>269</sup> Some claimed to have problems with redeeming ‘savings certificates,’ or bonds, that were bought during the Pakistan period.<sup>270</sup> However, the segment included political components, too. There were letters regarding border problems with India,<sup>271</sup> or responses to articles written in pro-government papers.<sup>272</sup> The letters also included information about the persecution of leftists around the country. One notable example of it is a letter from Rangpur claiming that people were being harassed and extorted money by the police, which threatened to frame them as Naxalites.<sup>273</sup>



Figure 4.2: A Letter requesting help for Bengali refugees stuck in Pakistan © Syed Irfanul Bari Collection, 2022.  
Used with permission

<sup>269</sup> Haq Kotha, “Dak Bibhagio Karmachari Der Abedon,” *Haq Kotha*, June 9, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>270</sup> Firoz Khan, “Savings Certificate,” *Haq Kotha*, June 30, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid.

<sup>272</sup> Ershad Uddin Ahmed, “Swadhinatar Shima Ache Prasangge,” *Haq Kotha*, August 4, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>273</sup> Wabda Lohani, “Badarganje Naxal Daman?,” *Haq Kotha*, August 25, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

These letters show the reach of Haq Kotha. They were coming from all over the country and from different classes of people. There were letters even from outside the country. A letter from a Pakistani captain who was discharged dishonorably for not complying during the war is an excellent example. As mentioned in the first chapter, the ex-captain wrote in from London about a war criminal who was enjoying a privileged position supported by the government.<sup>274</sup> Haq Kotha had a separate segment of the op-ed that usually focused on ongoing news and topics discussed regularly. In the ninth issue, there was an op-ed regarding the Major Jalil controversy.<sup>275</sup> As mentioned in an earlier chapter, the arrest of Major Jalil drew the attention of Haq Kotha and was interpreted by the weekly as an example of India's aggression in Bangladesh. The op-ed discussed two possible reasons why Major Jalil faced persecution. The two reasons are Jalil's disagreements with the top officials of the Bangladeshi army and preventing Indian soldiers from looting. There were also op-eds in the news highlighted by Haq Kotha, like the secret visit of Kissinger that was reported by Haq Kotha earlier,<sup>276</sup> as well as reports on government-sponsored propaganda in the newspaper.<sup>277</sup>

Haq Kotha's published letters also contained opinions and questions that did not conform with Haq Kotha's narrative. Some letters criticized Haq Kotha and Maulana Bhashani's politics. For these kinds of letters, Haq Kotha also posted answers from Maulana Bhashani and called this section 'Amar Jabab' or 'My answer.' For example, a letter from Dhaka claimed the contents of Haq Kotha are contradictory, because it was writing about progressive revolutionary politics and

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<sup>274</sup> Haq Kotha, "Pathan Captain Er Chithi."

<sup>275</sup> Haq Kotha, "Major Jalil Samachar," *Haq Kotha*, April 23, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>276</sup> Haq Kotha, "Markin Shikritir Antarale," *Haq Kotha*, April 30, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>277</sup> Haq Kotha, "Satya Bakker Satya-Mittha," *Haq Kotha*, May 19, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

writing in support of religion.<sup>278</sup> Along with the letter, they also posted an answer written by Bhashani explaining why he considered these issues to not be contradictory. In the twelfth issue, the weekly published a letter claiming Haq Kotha was biased because it avoided writing anything about the misdeeds of Maulana Bhashani's political party or another letter from Comilla accusing Maulana Bhashani of being communal.<sup>279</sup> Both letters were followed by long answers by Bhashani himself. This question-answer segment created a space for the readers to show dissent towards the government and the government's opposition; in this case, Haq Kotha and Maulana Bhashani. It gave space to hold Maulana Bhashani accountable, too. Haq Kotha's position was that anyone who holds some kind of authority over people must be held accountable despite politics, including news media.

### **Letters to Haq Kotha**

One can get a glimpse of the relationship that existed between Maulana Bhashani and the people through the letters they sent. Syed Irfanul Bari was the editor of Haq Kotha and was arrested in June of 1972. Syed Irfanul Bari continues to work on facilitating research and preservation of Maulana Bhashani's works and legacy. Bari's personal archive consists of a rich collection of documents and letters, including letters sent for publication in Haq Kotha. The vast number of letters, by itself, shows the popularity of Haq Kotha among the people. These letters demonstrate the variety of people from different classes, religions, and races and how they used the weekly to disseminate information and opinions, keeping Bhashani at its center and making Haq Kotha their platform.

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<sup>278</sup> Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani, "Amar Jabab," *Haq Kotha*, March 17, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>279</sup> Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani, "Amar Jabab-2," *Haq Kotha*, May 19, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

As mentioned earlier, the vast collection included letters from people of all walks of life. Groups and communities who might have even seen each other as enemies equally sought help from Haq Kotha. There were also a number of letters submitted and published about freedom

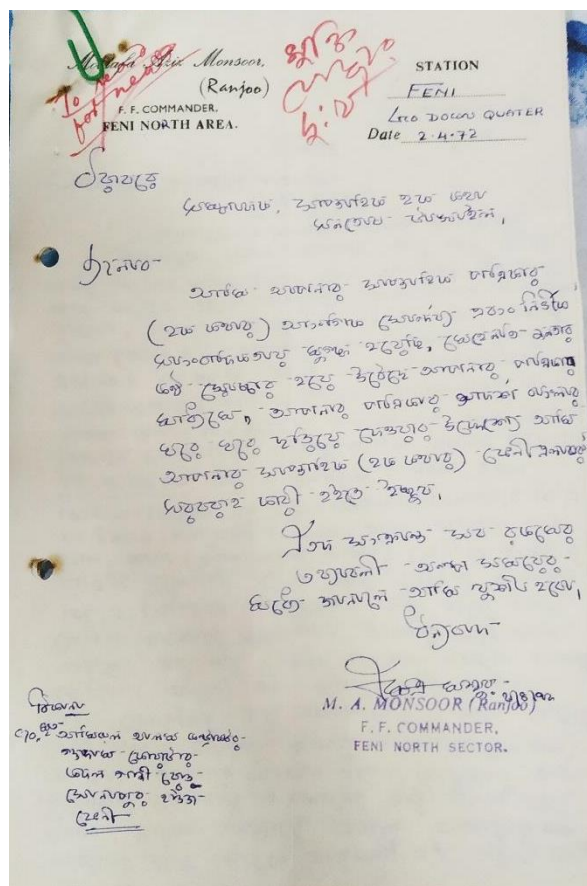


Figure 4.3: Letter by Commander M A Monsoor © Syed Irfanul Bari Collection, 2022. Used with permission

fighters. To show the variety of people who sent Haq Kotha letters, one example is that of freedom fighter M. A. Mansoor.<sup>280</sup> This letter tells the story of commander Mansoor and what happened to him after the war. His unit resisted the invasion of the Pakistani military in Feni until their village was destroyed, after which he joined the freedom fighters in India. The letter later describes

<sup>280</sup> Mostafa Aziz Mansoor, "Letter No. 21," April 2, 1972, Haq Kotha 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

Commander Mansoor's situation after independence, when he faced discrimination and subjugation, like many other freedom fighters who did not support the ruling party.

Another letter by freedom fighter Muhammad Elias showed what happened in a training camp in India and after the war in Bangladesh.<sup>281</sup> The letter stated that Haq Kotha was the only place he could trust to speak up against injustice. Elias was a college student when the war broke. Initially, he took refuge in his village, but later when the Pakistani military started taking over villages, he, along with some others, crossed the border and joined the Muktibahini. The letter describes the mismanagement and the sufferings and negligence the soldiers endured in the training camp while some of their leaders lived luxuriously. Elias then describes the post-war period where he discovered many war collaborators roaming freely and even working together with the ruling party. Elias's house in Dhaka was also looted and no proper steps were taken by the authorities to recover his possessions. At the end, Elias also added, 'Maybe this independence is only for the wealthy and powerful, not harmless and powerless people like me.'

Another freedom fighter by the name Shamser Ali Sarkar from Pabna sent a letter asking for any kind of job so he could survive.<sup>282</sup> Mr. Sarker wrote that he was a poor, uneducated man, with a big family to look after. He was an active member of Awami League and joined the Muktibahini in the war. The Pakistani military destroyed his store in Dhaka after which he received no help. In the letter, he requested help in the form of any kind of job so that he could support his family again. The letter included details of the misfortune of others and requested the opportunity to negotiate with the government and manage relief for those people.

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<sup>281</sup> Md. Elias, "Letter No. 57," 1972, Haq Kotha 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>282</sup> Shamsher Ali Sarkar, "Letter No. 50," 1972, Haq Kotha 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

Freedom fighter Shahjahan Mia from Feni wrote to Haq Kotha to find justice for his murdered brother and nephew.<sup>283</sup> The letter had the title ‘Who is actually enjoying the freedom?’ When Mia was away to fight in the war, his brother and nephew were captured and killed by war collaborators. After the war, when Mia tried to file police reports, he noticed that the police and the administrators were not doing anything to bring about justice. The accused collaborators were well known for their atrocities, but after the war they switched sides and started claiming to be freedom fighters. Those people, he argued, were enjoying shelter from the authorities. The letter pleaded to capture and bring justice to the war criminals.

Another important letter was sent by a guerrilla commander to Maulana Bhashani about the post war crisis.<sup>284</sup> The guerrilla commander, A. Karim, started the letter by stating that he was a follower of Bhashani’s ideology and that this ideology had inspired him to fight in the war. The letter reported on the corruption of a party member of NAP (B), Jalil of Dhaka. The guerrilla commander accused Jalil of giving shelter to war collaborators and taking bribes from the Biharis. Karim requested Bhashani to take proper action against this party member. Another letter from a freedom fighter, Abdul Wahab, similarly described his journey to join the fighting.<sup>285</sup> He then stated his poor health and financial conditions after the war. This letter claimed many freedom fighter impersonators were taking privileges from the government but that he himself had received no help. In another letter, freedom fighter Nur Muhammad described what was happening to the Biharis in a Pakistani military camp.<sup>286</sup> Muhammad started his letter by stating that atrocities were conducted by the Pakistani military. Muhammad also reported that Bihari women were tortured,

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<sup>283</sup> Shahjahan Mia, “Letter No. 43,” 1972, Haq Kotha 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>284</sup> A. Karim, “Letter No. 52,” January 30, 1972, Haq Kotha 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>285</sup> Abdul Wahab, “Letter No. 66,” May 3, 1972, Haq Kotha 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>286</sup> Muhammad Nur, “Letter No. 63,” May 3, 1972, Haq Kotha 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

including sexual assaults, by Bengalis in Dhaka. Muhammad stated that as a freedom fighter, he felt frustration in having no power to stop such abuse.

To,  
The Editor,  
Dacca News Papers,  
Daily- Weekly- Monthly,  
Dacca, Bangladesh.

Dear Sirs,

TRUE STORY.

These days every day in the news papers I read the news about the our Bangalee brothers are stranded in Pakistan, this news are coming daily in the news papers as well as our leaders are very much crying for our Bangalee Brothers stranded in Pakistan.

But no body nor our leaders nor the news papers reporters of our Bangladesh are crying for the stranded Non Bengalees in Bangladesh. The writer of this letter is personally gone to such places where the Non Bengalees are kept stranded in Bangladesh.

Do you think that Foreiner News reporter not going there, they are always active, and they are giving the news to their countries.

I have seen at Murapara Camp where the Non Bengalees kept in a very very bad condition, like Beggars can live, they have supplied the food once in a 24 hours only, almost all like 7,500 ladies, gents, childrens are there, they have got no cloths etc, no medicines, somany dies without food, medicines etc.

In Chittagong where the Non Bengalees are kept, given a same treatment as the case of Murapara Camp. In Paulatpur I have seen all the Non Bengalees stranded in one place, they have be a not supplied with the food and other necessary eating materials, they are also in a very bad conditions living there.

In Mirpur I have seen, that from Section No:1, 2, 6, 12, and Section 10 Block B, C, where generally Non Bengalees are lives previously, now a days all the above sections Houses estimated about 1500 all evaucated, and now a days our Bangalee brethren are living there. These non bangalees which are evicted from the above sections are living in inhuman condition in the open sky or tents in the grounds of Section 11, 12, and partly section 10 A Block. Not only that, there belongs already looted, they have got even no cloths to use, ~~sharax~~ Rations, they are passing the days like a beggars, this in human treatments are not at all be good for our Government. ~~QWUC~~ ~~QWUC~~ ~~QWUC~~ Over all what I have seen in these places in human treatments by the Government and the local people of this places, this should be checked immediately. I will request the News papers Reporters to go there and personally see the members of this community, and their difficulties.

In the month of last december-1971 our Minister Khondokar Mushtaque Ahmed informed the news man that Non Bengalees are nearly 5 Million in Bangladesh, but my calculation goes they are not more than 12 lakhs now a days, so where the rest population goes?

Yours faithfully,  
L. R. K. Megumdar.  
18/B. Kalabagan, Dacca. 44

Figure 4.4: Letter written in English about the refugee crisis of Bengalis and Biharis © Syed Irfanul Bari Collection, 2022. Used with permission



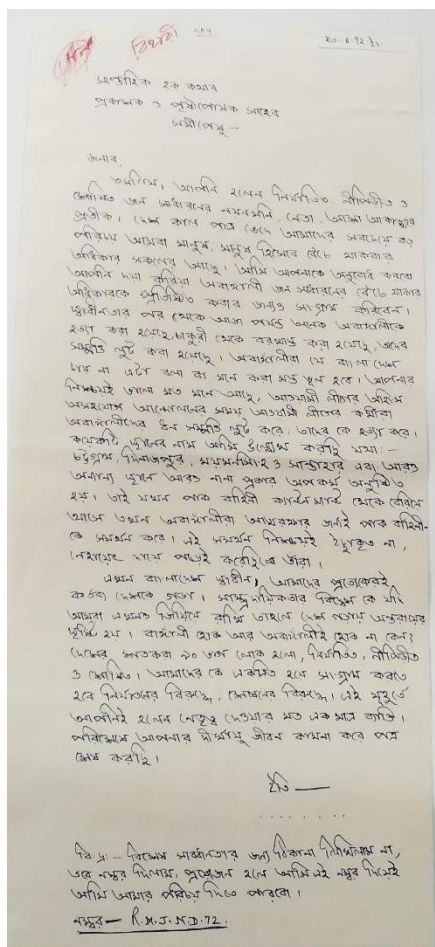


Figure 4.5: Letter about the refugee crisis of Bengalis and Biharis © Syed Irfanul Bari Collection, 2022. Used with permission

The Bihari community were facing violent persecution in newly independent Bangladesh. In addition to letters from freedom fighters, one can look into the letters sent by the Biharis. In one such letter by an anonymous Bihari, the writer started by addressing Maulana Bhashani as the leader of all oppressed people.<sup>287</sup> In the letter, the writer requested Bhashani to take proper steps to protect the Biharis stuck in Bangladesh. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Biharis were known as collaborators of the Pakistan army during the war. The letter argued that not all Biharis

<sup>287</sup> "Letter No. 29," April 23, 1972, Haq Kotha 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

supported the army's aggression and that the author had no issue with Bengalis. The writer described the racism and discrimination Biharis were facing, even those who were innocent. The author pleads again that Bhashani do something to stop this discrimination. Another letter regarding the refugee crisis shows the complexity of post-independence Bangladesh. This letter, from Dhaka and written in English, showed concern about the Bengali refugees stuck in Pakistan. It claimed that no authority was taking proper steps to help bring them back. The letter also informed Maulana Bhashani of the crisis happening in the Bihari refugee camp, as well, confirming reports from other letter writers.

The archive contains several letters regarding the massacre that happened on the Biharis in Khalishpur, Khulna on March 12, 1972. A telegram was found in the collection addressed to Maulana Bhashani about the genocide.<sup>288</sup> The telegram was sent by an 'association of unemployed' of Khalishpur, two days after the massacre took place. It requested help and claimed the massacre took eleven thousand lives and that the perpetrators had also abducted hundreds of girls.

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<sup>288</sup> "Telegram No. 59," March 14, 1972, Haq Kotha 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

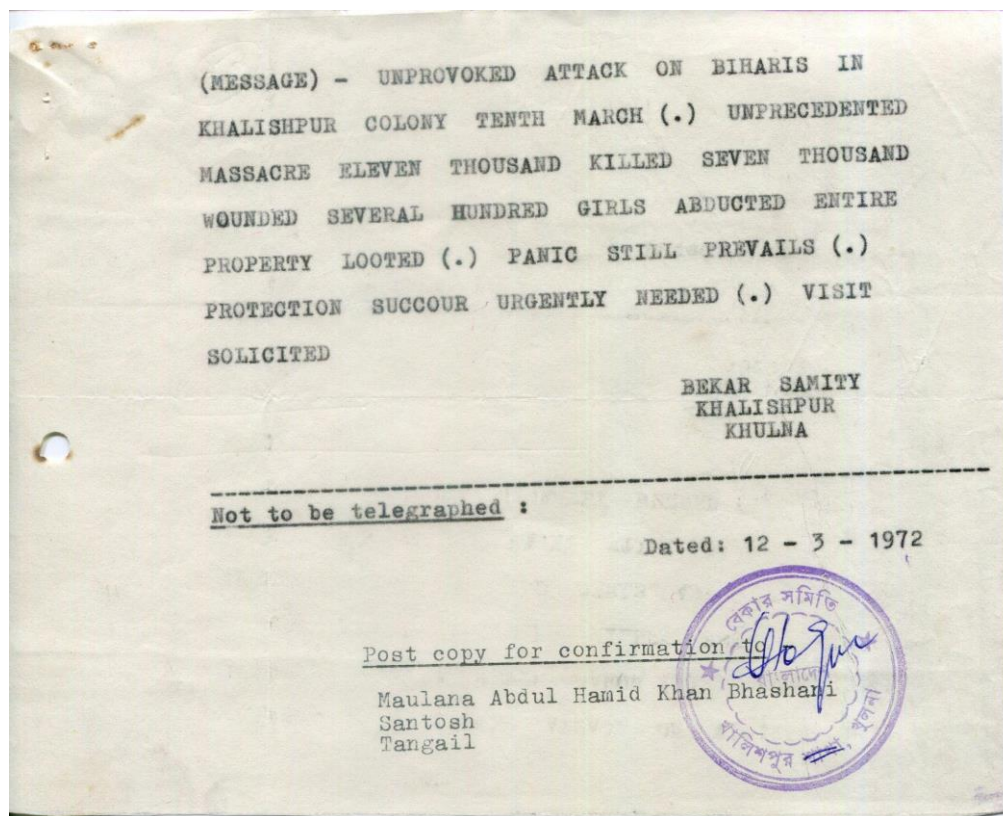


Figure 4.6: Telegram about the Khalishpur massacre © Syed Irfanul Bari Collection, 2022. Used with permission

There were letters sent by Biharis regarding the Khalishpur massacre, as well. One letter was sent two days after the massacre took place by a Bihari named Mustak Ahmed.<sup>289</sup> Ahmed described the brutality of the massacre and how it devastated the whole community. Even elderly people, women, and children were not spared from the violence. The letter claimed that the massacre took at least three thousand non-Bengali lives and that many women were raped and killed. Ahmed requested Bhashani to save them, in his capacity as the leader of the oppressed. Another letter by an anonymous Bihari reports similar violence happening in Khalishpur.<sup>290</sup> It

<sup>289</sup> Mustak Ahmed, "Letter No. 58," March 13, 1972, Haq Kotha 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>290</sup> "Letter No. 60," April 1972, Haq Kotha 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

reported both the massacre and abduction of women. The writer urged Bhashani to hold the government accountable and help the Biharis. Haq Kotha published reports on this incident in their fifth issue. It wrote, “Can the government answer how and why hundreds of injured people ended up in the Khulna Sadar Hospital? Why in Khalishpur colony blood of thousands were spilled within hours?.”<sup>291</sup> The New York Times also reported on this incident, saying that the brutality was so extreme that Bengalis are ashamed even to talk about it.<sup>292</sup> These are very important findings, considering there are so few available documents about the violence inflicted upon the Biharis.<sup>293</sup> Christian Gerlach’s work on the Bengali-Bihari conflict during 1971-1972 argues that violence upon the Biharis by the Bengalis was also present during and after the war. These letters to Haq Kotha provide more information and a deeper understanding about the conditions the Bihari community faced after the war. Moreover, it reveals first-hand knowledge of the Khalishpur massacre, an incident about which little in Bangladesh is spoken or publicly acknowledged.

A lot of reports sent by the people were about the ‘dalal’ or war collaborators. Many collaborators escaped, were pardoned, or they were incorporated by the ruling class. This flexibility for particular war criminals was a recurring theme in Haq Kotha. From hard news to ‘Eha ki Shotto’, this topic was present in every segment. A letter from Srinagar reported previous collaborators being pardoned.<sup>294</sup> The letter informed its readers that many collaborators who

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<sup>291</sup> Haq Kotha, “Ke Jabab Dibe?,” *Haq Kotha*, March 24, 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>292</sup> Sydney H. Scranberg, “Bengalis Ashamed Of Burst of Revenge Against the Biharis,” *The New York Times*, March 17, 1972, sec. Archives, <https://www.nytimes.com/1972/03/17/archives/bengalis-ashamed-of-burst-of-revenge-against-the-biharis-bengalis.html>.

<sup>293</sup> Christian Gerlach addressed the same problem in his work on crowd violence in East Pakistan. Christian Gerlach, “Crowd Violence in East Pakistan/Bangladesh 1971–1972,” in *Genocide and Mass Violence in Asia An Introductory Reader* (De Gruyter, 2019), 17, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110659054>.

<sup>294</sup> Muhammad Abdul Hamid Mia, “Letter No. 54,” 1972, Haq Kotha 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

should be tried for war crimes were roaming freely. To hide their crimes, it claimed, they joined Awami League and sought help from the local MCA officer. The letter ended in describing the people of Srinagar as still living in fear, just as they did during the war, due to the presence of these people.

Another letter reported the misdeeds of a Deputy Postmaster General during the war.<sup>295</sup> The writer pointed out that the Postmaster General Mohiuddin Ahmed roamed free without any trial. The letter listed details about his role as a dalal actively surveilling for the Pakistani army and reporting suspected Muktibahini. People who ended up on his list of suspects were taken by the Pakistan army and executed. Another letter from Dhaka gave a similar testament about a Deputy Superintendent Police officer from Dhaka.<sup>296</sup> The police officer actively helped the Pakistani army, which included torturing prisoners. The letter also pointed out that the officer was being promoted instead of facing trial. The writer stated with frustration that the same person who was a dalal now had the responsibility to catch another dalal.

There were also reports about threatening or falsely accusing people as dalal. A letter reported to Haq Kotha that a local politician had threatened the writer, saying that he would be tagged as a dalal.<sup>297</sup> The politician asked for five hundred and fifty taka or else the writer would be killed. In another letter, an accused collaborator wrote to claim his innocence.<sup>298</sup> The writer claimed during the war that many people joined the 'Peace Committee' as Pakistani collaborators out of fear for their lives. The writer also claimed he never caused any harm or helped the Pakistani

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<sup>295</sup> Azizul Haq, "Letter No. 70," 1972, Haq Kotha 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

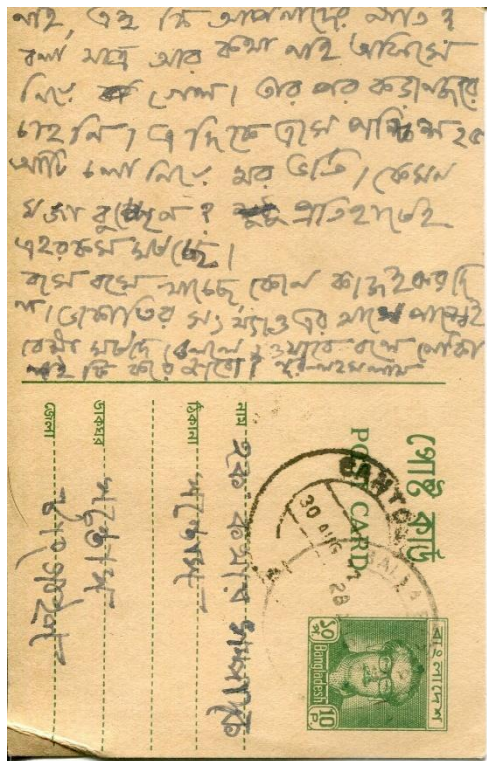
<sup>296</sup> Islam Nazrul, "Letter No. 69," 1972, Haq Kotha 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>297</sup> Kutub Uddin, "Letter No. 61," February 26, 1972, Haq Kotha 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>298</sup> "Letter No. 102," 1972, Haq Kotha 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

army. Now that he was facing an accusation of being a collaborator, the writer asked for a fair trial and to punish only those who committed war crimes.

Many of the letters came from people who were from the poor, unprivileged class, those who saw no other way to resolve their problems or seek justice. For example, a woman from Tangail sent a letter to Maulana Bhashani describing her family's impoverished condition.<sup>299300</sup>



On

Figure 4.7: Postcard sent to Haq Kotha © Syed Irfanul Bari Collection, 2022. Used with permission

on top of that, the local gangsters had taken over their flour mill. She requested Bhashani to help her recover their only income source. There are also postcards with messages like the one provided below figure 4.5. One of the postcards addressed to Haq Kotha describes how some

<sup>299</sup> Nurul Islam, “Letter No. 39,” 1972, Haq Kotha 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>300</sup> Jobeda Khatun, “Letter No. 31,” 1972, Haq Kotha 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

police extracted money from poor people in the Bollabazar area.<sup>301</sup> The author was also threatened when he tried to confront and negotiate with them. Others included information about a communal riot between Hindu and Muslim, which was provoked by some Chatra League members.

Another letter written from Pabna tells the story of a man from Pabna.<sup>302</sup> The writer addressed Bhashani as Abba or father and described himself a murid or spiritual follower. The writer described his poor condition and luck. The local gangsters looted his house and destroyed everything in front of him. The man and his family were left penniless and had nowhere to go. The writer requested Bhashani save them. A letter was sent from the prison.<sup>303</sup> The writer was held in jail without any trial, unsure of why he was arrested. The letter describes the poor conditions of the jail and the many people who are being held like him. The letter did not contain the name of the writer. Instead, it said only “‘Majlum’ (oppressed) from prison.”<sup>304</sup>

These letters show the dynamics of Maulana Bhashani’s network among his audience and his people. Haq Kotha created an inclusive space where a broad range of community members could share their concerns and views. The Biharis after the war were perceived and persecuted as the community against Bengali nationalism and the independence of Bangladesh. On the other hand, the freedom fighters were the heroes of the war. Both, who would seem polar opposites in terms of social and political context, sought help from Maulana Bhashani and chose Haq Kotha as the medium to share their opinion.

These letters give insight into the process of news and information gathering for Haq Kotha. The impact of these letters is quite visible in Haq Kotha. They were published in different

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<sup>301</sup> Nurul Islam, “Letter No. 39,” 1972, Haq Kotha 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>302</sup> Jalal Mia, “Letter No. 106,” February 9, 1972, Haq Kotha 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>303</sup> “Letter No. 67,” 1972, Haq Kotha 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid.

segments besides ‘Eha ki Shotto’. For example, Haq Kotha published a detailed two-part report about enemy collaborators getting pardoned and corrupt government officials extorting money from civilians in April.<sup>305</sup> The report claimed these complaints were sent by readers and verified by the newspaper staff. There were letters sent to Haq Kotha in February addressing these issues found in the archive.<sup>306</sup> Haq Kotha also responded to the letters of falsely prosecuting enemy collaborators and published an article.<sup>307</sup> (letter no. 61, 106), nirdosh bekti . The news of the Bihari massacre was also reported right after the incident.<sup>308</sup> These letters also influenced Haq Kotha’s agendas and understanding of different political incidents. A letter from an army official informed Maulana Bhashani that a significant military team of considerable size, including the writer himself, would visit the Soviet Union soon.<sup>309</sup> He also added that the Indian army was being mobilized inside Bangladesh. The author suspects there are some hidden political agendas behind this trip. He requested to keep his identity anonymous but requested Haq Kotha publish a story on the subject. Another letter was sent by a group of school students to report on the chairman of the village.<sup>310</sup> The chairman cut down three Mahogany trees of public properties and tried to sell them. Some of the students noticed the incident and stopped him. The news was published in the ‘Eha ki shotto’ segment.

These letters and network of people who were continuously communicating and sharing their poor conditions, information, and insights were instrumental for Haq Kotha. The letters explain why Haq Kotha focused so much on these topics. This network of people from different

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<sup>305</sup> Haq Kotha, “Mujibbadi Dalal.”

<sup>306</sup> Uddin, “Letter No. 61”; Mia, “Letter No. 106.”

<sup>307</sup> Bhashani, “Nirdosh Bekti Der Saja Jeni Na Hoy.”

<sup>308</sup> Haq Kotha, “Ke Jabab Dibe?”

<sup>309</sup> Barua, “Letter No. 110,” August 28, 1972, Haq Kotha 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.

<sup>310</sup> Students, “Letter No. 34,” 1972, Haq Kotha 1972, Syed Irfanul Bari Collection.



backgrounds and classes that provided Haq Kotha news became its backbone and allowed it to play the role of a whistleblower. Corruption by government officials; the crisis faced by the freedom fighters, laypeople, and Bihari; and Soviet and Indian interference were all recurring themes in Haq Kotha's dynamic weekly. This is how Haq Kotha relied on the people, especially people who had limited agency to express concerns and counter the ongoing problems they were facing.

## Conclusion

Haq Kotha was banned after its thirtieth issue, but this was not the end. Maulana Bhashani would keep publishing bulletins under different names like Bhashani's Last Word, Satya Kotha, Bhashani's Telegram, and others. However, these would not have the same magnitude or impact that Haq Kotha once had. Haq Kotha was revived and started publishing again after 1976, but not on a regular basis, and by then the government was also a different one. Haq Kotha even published a total of ninety-nine issues after the demise of Maulana Bhashani in 1977. Nevertheless, the first thirty issues during the making of Bangladesh had the most significant impact on politics in Bangladesh.

This thesis investigated these thirty issues in order to explore the nature of Haq Kotha as radical media. It also explored what Haq Kotha contributed during this critical period of Bangladesh's history. Through analyzing Haq Kotha, the main question this thesis tried to answer is what the newly independent Bangladesh meant for subaltern groups. As a news media with a particularly large reach and contribution from the working classes, Haq Kotha is an important example of radical media that was used to resist oppression and show dissent in newly independent Bangladesh. Haq Kotha provides an idea of what power looked like from below in 1972. This was a crucial time because it was when the state of Bangladesh was beginning to form. Haq Kotha did not only cover how this formation was taking place, it showed what the subaltern was experiencing because of it. It was the experience of the disempowered that was able to paint the gruesome picture of the post-war condition of the country. The newspaper was able to show the end of the war did not mean peace was established. While the new government was taking control of the country, the

subaltern saw the emergence of a new ruling class. Haq Kotha showed this emergence of a new ruling class involved processes that excludes if not exploits the subaltern.

Haq Kotha projected a complex and disquieting picture of the liberation war of 1971. Its focus was on the suffering that different marginalized people faced. This is why it was very critical of the post-war condition and drew its attention to the shifts that were causing suffrage to the people. Haq Kotha was also concerned about how the government was interpreting the war. It saw this as an attempt to solidify state power. For these reasons, Haq Kotha was vocal on questions like when Independence Day should be and the political position of different parties when the war broke out. The complexity of the war was heightened when Haq Kotha showed skepticism regarding India's role as a foreign power. It did not refuse India's significance in winning the war, but did not see their role as a result of sheer goodwill. The most impactful interpretation of the war by Haq Kotha probably was framing it as a war that failed to be a revolution. The central command and control over the Mukti Bahini by the Awami League and India, Haq Kotha argued, interrupted the revolutionary process. The lack of class consciousness and no radical change in the new ruling class convinced Haq Kotha that the new state building process was not consistent with the revolutionary goal of abolishing class exploitation.

The primary focus of Haq Kotha was the ongoing process of state-building. It gave much attention and critical scope to the ruling class to ensure they were held accountable. Along these lines, it continuously raised the question of peoples' contribution in making the new state. This is where the making of an infrastructure of dissent can be seen. Haq Kotha became a platform for many communities who were facing oppression, subjugation, and persecution. It focused on state-sponsored violence and how the ruling class solidified its power. This is why Haq Kotha concentrated on the government's role in mass corruption and violence. The famine crisis and

corruption in relief distribution brought not only criticism of mismanagement, it was also interpreted as related to the class nature of the new government and the state that the elite classes aimed to build. The weekly observed that the new state was not only being built without taking account of the people's opinion, but that it was also doing so in a way to ensure the systemic exploitation of these people. Haq Kotha simultaneously was concerned about the foreign influences on the state-building process. The fear of a new imperialist aggression was always present in Haq Kotha's pages. The role of these powerful countries' should not be underestimated, and the weekly focused mostly on the dangers of Russian and Indian neo-colonialist impulses. These countries were seen as a much bigger threat because they supported the suppression of the people by the new ruling class. The military presence of India in Bangladesh and the liberalization of commerce for Indian businessmen was understood as a new form of colonialism. Haq Kotha played a vital role here in linking state-sponsored violence to foreign influence.

This thesis also explored the weekly's ideological understanding and views. It contained a unique combination of Islamic spiritualism and socialism which contributed significantly to popular understanding of concepts like anti-communalism, class struggle, and equality. Spiritualism was Haq Kotha's most unique and strongest approach, used to advocate for socialism and anti-communalism. Haq Kotha is a fascinating example of an attempt by the progressive left in South Asia to present religion and secularism not as polar opposites but as complementary. Maulana Bhashani's Sufi philosophy, Rabubiyat, was at its core, but it also drew influence from other philosophies, particularly Marxism.

Maulana Bhashani was central to Haq Kotha. It was part of his series of political projects that were concentrated on increasing the agency of the people and holding the government accountable. This thesis tried to demonstrate how Haq Kotha functioned as a political project. The

Bangladeshi people's relationship with Haq Kotha created new narratives and different perspectives. Syed Irfanul Bari's collection of Haq Kotha and letters were instrumental for this thesis. As a result of the ongoing political climate, Haq Kotha is still not available for the public to view in most public libraries and archives. These letters from the collection provide a better insight into the period. The space that was created by Maulana Bhashani through radical media gave voice to the most oppressed communities, many of whom are still struggling to fight for their human rights. This thesis was only able to show some aspects of Haq Kotha. There are certainly many more of Bhashani's political and media projects that need to be explored. In addition, there are more segments of Haq Kotha that were not discussed here, such as the satirical or the poem segments. The linguistic structure of Haq Kotha as a medium of the subaltern alone is an important topic that deserves equal attention. There is also a lot of work yet to be done on Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani as a political figure, as well. More information about Bhashani is being revealed every day by researchers that begs historians to rethink the political dynamics of that era.

## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A: The six points of demands by the Awami League (AL)**

1. The Constitution should provide for a Federation of Pakistan in its true sense on the Lahore Resolution and the parliamentary form of government with supremacy of a Legislature directly elected based on universal adult franchise.
2. The federal government should deal with only two subjects: Defence and Foreign Affairs, and all other residuary subjects shall be vested in the federating states.
3. Two separate but freely convertible currencies for two wings should be introduced; or if this is not feasible, there should be one currency for the whole country, but effective constitutional provisions should be introduced to stop the flight of capital from East to West Pakistan. Furthermore, a separate Banking Reserve should be established, and a separate fiscal and monetary policy be adopted for East Pakistan.
4. The power of taxation and revenue collection shall be vested in the federating units, and the federal center will have no such power on the issue. The federation will be entitled to a share in the state taxes to meet its expenditures.
5. There should be two separate accounts for the foreign exchange earnings of the two wings; the foreign exchange requirements of the federal government should be met by the two wings equally or in a ratio to be fixed; indigenous products should move free of duty between the two wings, and the Constitution should empower the units to establish trade links with foreign countries.
6. East Pakistan should have a separate militia or paramilitary force.

## **Appendix B: National Awami Party's fourteen points of demand**

1. Abolishment of present legislatures and constructing new ones chosen directly by the people through vote. The constitution must be amend the issues mentioned below:
  - A. East and West Pakistan both must have full autonomy under a federal governing system. The central government will deal only with national security, foreign relations and currency.
  - B. The provinces of West Pakistan must have autonomy based on their culture, language and geological relevance.
  - C. The Council will have the ability to propose and pass laws and budgets and the president and governor will not have the ability to impose new laws.
  - D. The basic human right and freedom must be ensured for all people adopted by the United Nation in 1948.
2. Reestablish full freedom of the individual and withdrawal of the state of emergency in the country.
3. The political prisoners like Prince Karim, Abdus Samad Khan Achukchai, Ataulлах Khan Mengal, Moni Krishna Sen, Abdul Halim in both East and West Pakistan who have been arrested and punished only for political reasons must be released. Every case and arrest warrant against all political activists must be cancelled.
4. Pakistan must cancel its membership of SEATO and CENTO. Pakistan cannot have any US military base and Pakistan cannot be a part of a similar pact in future
5. Pakistan must rebuild its defense infrastructure. East Pakistan must be self sufficient regarding defense. The Headquarters of NAVY should be moved to East Pakistan.

6. The main objective of East Pakistan's industrial laws will be the advancement of its people. Transfer of capital from East Pakistan has to be stopped. In both wings, people will not be exploited and controlled by the few families. Important industries will be controlled by the state.
7. The defense industry must be limited and controlled by the government and must be established on both wings.
8. Bureaucratic and imperial capital must be nationalized along with banks, insurance companies and the jute industry.
9. Private property needs to be limited by 33 acres in East Pakistan and 100 acres in West Pakistan.
10. The restrictions on the labor organizations must be lifted and the workers rights acknowledged by the ILO conventions must be respected. Minimum wages for workers must be assured.
11. Education must be available in all the local languages. The Hamidur Rahman Commission's report needs to be rejected.
12. The oppressions going on in Beluchistan needs to be stopped and the Sardar system has to be abolished.
13. Proper steps must be taken to stop the flood crisis in East Pakistan.
14. The existing system to reduce tax for general people needs to be refined.



### **Appendix C: The seven-agreement conspiracy by the government published in Haq Kotha**

1. A military force will be made in Bangladesh, where India can refer who will join and lead the force. Although it will be known as a paramilitary force in practice, it will function as the military. The weekly added Awami League's 'Rakkhi-Bahini' force probably was born because of this agreement.
2. The assistance Bangladesh got from India has to be repaid in different ways. It included that Bangladesh cannot buy weapons from any other country.
3. India will control Bangladesh's foreign trade. Bangladesh has to seek the permission of India before it exports goods to any other country.
4. Bangladesh must approve its annual and five-year plan by India.
5. Bangladesh's foreign policy has to be aligned with India's policy.
6. Bangladesh cannot reject any deal done by these two countries, but India can. And
7. Indian army can come to enter the Bangladesh border if they deem necessary.

#### **Appendix D: Instruction for murids by Maulana Bhashani published in Haq Kotha**

1. You must fulfill your duties towards Allah as well as your duties towards humankind (no matter the religion and race).
2. You must work and join movements to establish socialism. [This is] the only way to bring peace and prosperity.
3. Fear no one except Allah. You must stand against every injustice and oppression.
4. You must stay away from bribery, addiction and taking away property that belongs to someone else.
5. In villages you must establish schools for children and night schools for adults.
6. Stay away from false fakirs and ascetics.
7. In leisure time, talk about Allah and his nature and glory among yourselves. Discuss the current social and economic conditions too to determine your responsibility.
8. Practice dhikr of Allah on every eleventh night of the lunar month.
9. Contact me whenever you come to Santosh, Tangail.

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